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# The Horn of Africa and Arabia

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# **The Horn of Africa and Arabia**

## **Conference Papers**

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Defense Academic Research Support Program  
and  
The Middle East Institute  
1990

# Preface

These papers were delivered at a conference entitled "The Horn of Africa and the Bab al-Mandab Region" and sponsored by the Defense Academic Research Support Program (DARSP) and the Middle East Institute (MEI). Sessions were held at the United States Central Command Headquarters, McDill Air Force Base, Florida, 16-17 January 1990.

The conference met to discuss current political and military trends in the Horn of Africa and southwestern Arabia and the possible linkages between the two. The 22 May 1990 unification of the two Yemens into one Republic of Yemen overturned the expectations of several of the conference participants, government and academic alike, demonstrating, once again, that analysts in and out of government face the same difficulties in predicting future events in the Middle East or elsewhere.

Our objective was not to prove or disprove anyone's prescience, but rather to bring together scholars and analysts who may not often talk to each other and enable them to share ideas and perspectives on the region of the Horn of Africa. The result was two days of intensive discussions on the Horn of Africa which placed the problems of the Horn of Africa in a wider regional context and helped to close the distance not only between government and academic circles, but also between Africanists and Arabists, whose regions are next to each other, but whose analysts seldom interact.

The success of the conference and the appearance of this printed volume are due to the efforts and dedication of many individuals. A special note of thanks to the United States Central Command and particularly to Brigadier General H.F. Drewfs, US

Army, Director of Intelligence, for his support for the conference, and to Mr. Ed Valentine and Major David White, US Army, whose administrative assistance ensured the success of the proceedings at McDill.

Thanks must also go to the staff of the Middle East Institute, including Mr. Andrew Parasiliti, Program Officer, and three MEI interns: Michael Samway, who provided research and editorial assistance; and Nazan Armenian and John Schembari for assistance in compiling the bibliography.

From the College staff, Mr. Steven R. Dorr, Dr. Max L. Gross and Dr. Barry M. Schutz worked with Mr. Parasiliti to develop the conference agenda. Ms. Patricia E. Lanzara provided exemplary administrative assistance, and Lieutenant Neysa M. Slater, US Navy, provided valuable copy editing and publishing assistance. Without all their efforts this volume could not have appeared.

The views contained in this document are those of the authors and should not be interpreted as necessarily representing the official policy, either expressed or implied, of the Defense Intelligence College, the Department of Defense, or the US Government.

The Defense Academic Research Support Program (DARSP), initiated in 1982, provides a vehicle for direct contact and scholarly exchange between defense analysts and noted experts on the Third World. DARSP is managed by the Research Center of the Defense Intelligence College, a professional, accredited, degree-granting institution. DARSP concentrates exclusively on the Third World and supports only unclassified research.

# Introduction

Definition of United States interests in the Horn of Africa has long preoccupied both those who make American foreign policy and those who are called upon to implement it. It has never been an easy task, and it is even less so now as the world enters the 1990s. The protuberance at the northeastern corner of the African continent, at the junction of the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean, sits aside the major sea link between Europe and Asia, a route through which much of the oil wealth of the Persian Gulf must pass on its way to the West. This alone gives it geopolitical and strategic importance. But just how much?

The answer is a function of the times. In the 1970s and through most of the 1980s, the Horn of Africa was the scene of intense East-West rivalry. The Soviet Union challenged the West's predominance there first by establishing for itself a political and military foothold in Somalia and then by trading its stake there for a much larger one in Ethiopia. The United States sought to block the USSR's advance and reverse its gains by shoring up both militarily and economically Ethiopia's neighbors and rivals, Somalia and Sudan. The rulers of all three Horn countries used the help extended by their great power patrons to pursue their own political aims.

The result has been pretty much a draw: Soviet position in Ethiopia has collapsed, but so, in different ways, has that of the United States in Sudan and Somalia.

The end of the Cold War and the collapse of the strategies associated with it call for a redefinition, as the 1990s begin, of United States interests in the Horn of Africa. The papers presented in this volume pretend less to accomplish that task than to provide the information needed to begin it. The picture they present of the situation in the three major states of the area is a grim one. Sudan, Ethiopia, and Somalia are all racked by civil war and famine to a degree that threatens the underpinnings of government and society. The papers on these countries seek to explain how the governments of each have brought their countries to the verge of ruin.

No study of the Horn of Africa would be complete without a view of its immediate neighbors on the opposite shore, the Yemens and Saudi Arabia. Both have played a role in the politics of the Horn, and that role may well assume greater importance as East-West rivalry in the area diminishes. As the reader will see, it is not necessarily one that is guaranteed to promote stability.

David A. Korn  
Editor



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# The Strategic Importance of the Bab al-Mandab and the Horn of Africa: A Global Perspective

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The strategic importance of the Bab al-Mandab and the Horn of Africa lies in its location astride two major international waterways, the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean, and adjacent to the Arabian peninsula. In addition, most of the waters of the Nile originate in Ethiopia. The region's strategic importance stems not from its own resources, which are meager, but rather from its proximity to other areas of great strategic significance, such as the Persian Gulf, and the sea lanes from it. After all, were it not for the Horn of Africa's role as a passageway for the flow of oil from the Persian Gulf, it is highly doubtful that the region would receive as much attention as it does in US policy circles. It is worth recalling that even before the discovery and exploitation of oil on the Arabian peninsula, Western involvement in the Horn of Africa derived from interests in areas further east of Suez. The colonization of the region by the European powers in the late nineteenth century was stimulated mainly by the need to protect and support maritime traffic along the newly-opened Suez Canal-Red Sea routes to Asia and Africa. As a result, major ports were developed by the British at Aden and the French at Djibouti. From a global perspective, any assessment of the strategic importance of the region must take into account these connections to interests in other areas, for the strategic significance of the former is largely a function of the importance assigned to the latter.

A global perspective of the region's strategic importance must also consider the discrete interests of the major external states involved, since these interests vary significantly. In my estimate, the major foreign countries are the Soviet Union, the United States, France, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt. To be sure, other European, Middle Eastern, and Asian states have interests in the region, but these interests tend to be of a lesser magnitude and often run parallel to the those of the main extra-regional states.

Another selection criterion employed here relates to the nature of the strategic interests at stake. Our consideration is restricted mainly to positive interests, or acquisitive goals, and not negative, or denial goals. Thus, for example, while China may have earlier had a strategic interest in denying Soviet access through the Bab al-Mandab, and Libya may today have an interest in denying Israeli access to the Red Sea, neither of these states has appreciable positive interests in the region worth protecting. We shall, however, discuss some of these denial goals briefly when reviewing the threats to the positive interests of the major states concerned. In addition, we have made one major exception by including a discussion of potential Soviet threats to oil shipping and US naval forces in this region (examples of denial goals), since these threats have long received prominent attention and been the subject of often ill-informed speculation in the West.

The interests of external states in the region have not remained static over time. In recent decades, important changes in the nature of these interests and the threats to them, both perceived and real, have taken place. And as the implications of the basic improvement in East-West relations are drawn out, new assessments of the strategic significance of the region will emerge.



In this paper, the positive interests of the main external states in the region will be considered separately and in depth. The purpose here is to identify what these interests are, and are not, as well as to evaluate the threats to these interests. We shall also consider how these interests and threats to them have changed over time, and may do so in the future in light of a changing international environment. Although we shall examine the interests of the six main external nations separately, it is worth drawing attention to the important linkages that exist among them largely stemming from alliance considerations. To cite one example, the US has agreed to support Israel's right to "free and unimpeded passage" through and over the Red Sea and the Bab al-Mandab, according to the terms of a 1975 memorandum of understanding between the two governments. Hence, alliance considerations factor into the way states calculate their own interests in the region. Once the interests of the individual states have been reviewed, we shall present some generalizations about the evolving strategic importance of the Bab al-Mandab/Horn of Africa region.

### **Soviet Interests**

Of all the foreign powers, the Soviet Union arguably has the paramount interests in the region. These interests are multiple, and some are essential to Soviet national security. The region lies astride the USSR's southern sea route, the shortest sea lines of communication open year round between its European and Pacific ports. The next fastest route runs around the Cape of Good Hope, which takes approximately an extra 18 sailing days.<sup>1</sup> It has been estimated that well over 50 percent of the USSR's transcontinental freight has been carried over this route.<sup>2</sup> Reliance on the southern sea route is not likely to be reduced appreciably by the introduction into service of the Baikal-Amur (BAM) railroad line, which should eventually open up Siberia's natural resources to commercial exploitation and foreign export. This would constrain the BAM line's limited ability to relieve some of the pressure of intercontinental commerce from the Trans-Siberian railroad. In fact, since the BAM line was opened in 1984, Soviet maritime traffic has gradually increased. Whereas 1,823 Soviet-flagged vessels transited the Suez Canal in 1981, by 1987 the number had risen to 2,281, accounting for 6.8 percent of

the net tonnage of ships using the Canal.<sup>3</sup> The Soviet Union ranked as the fourth highest user of the Suez Canal (after Liberia, Panama, and Greece). A significant part of Soviet shipping through the Suez Canal is bound for India, Vietnam, and other Asian and African states with which the USSR maintains trade and aid ties. These economic ties have grown as well.

Soviet interest in protecting its southern sea route is long standing. Even in the last century, Russian tsars took an interest in cultivating ties with Christian Ethiopia, undoubtedly in the hope of eventually planting a Russian flag along the shores of the Red Sea, then the object of British, French, and Italian colonial expansion. In modified form, this interest was carried over by the tsars' successors. At the end of World War II, Stalin tried unsuccessfully to establish Soviet control over Italy's former colonies, including Eritrea. Well before the Soviets established a regular naval presence in these waters at the close of the 1960s, they undertook aid projects apparently in preparation for this eventuality. In the 1950s, they constructed the North Yemen port of Hodeidah and built an airport nearby. In the early 1960s, they dredged the Somali port of Berbera. Although these projects could be rationalized on purely economic grounds, their military utility became evident when the Soviets began to develop and use Berbera as the principal support base for the Soviet Indian Ocean Squadron in the 1970s.

The Soviet naval presence in the region can, in part, be regarded as a concrete expression of Soviet concern about the security of its southern sea route. This concern seems to have peaked around the time the Soviets established a routine naval presence in the area, in the late 1960s following the British withdrawal east of Suez. Although the Soviets probably saw this withdrawal, coupled with the US preoccupation in the Vietnam War, as an excellent opportunity for them to use their emerging military power to expand their political influence throughout the Indian Ocean area, they may also have been motivated by defensive considerations. Chinese influence on both sides of the Bab al-Mandab was then on the rise. With mounting tensions along the Sino-Soviet border, the Soviets might have feared that Chinese influence among the littoral nations could be used against them, at a minimum to deny the USSR access to local ports and airfields, and at

worst to obstruct Soviet maritime traffic. Sino-Soviet clashes along the Ussuri river in 1969 must have underlined the value of the shorter sea route through the Suez Canal (closed since the June 1967 Arab-Israeli war and only reopened following the October 1973 Arab-Israeli war) in the event of a Sino-Soviet War, especially in the period before the Soviets augmented their stocks of war materiel and strengthened their military and naval forces in the Far East. If the Trans-Siberian railroad were also to be cut in such a conflict, the southern sea route would become critically important. In addition, access to local port facilities would also have been valuable, should it have been needed by transiting ships.

Although the Soviets have never discussed openly the importance of water routes around Africa in the event of a Sino-Soviet War, they have used historical examples as surrogates to imply their current concerns. In his 1976 *Sea Power of the State*, for example, Admiral Sergei Gorshkov commented on the voyage around Africa of the Russian squadron, which the Japanese sunk in 1905 at the Tsushima straits, in these words:

*The history of the Russian fleet and indeed of other fleets still did not know of such a distant and long movement of a huge fleet consisting of a variety of ships, some of which were not fully seaworthy, with no experience of combined long-distance oceanic travel. Over the entire route the squadron did not have a single base for resting the crew, for repair and supply, most of the shores along which it passed belonged to hostile England.*<sup>4</sup>

Gorshkov's explanation here is historically inaccurate, for the French permitted the Russian fleet to use their bases at Diego Suarez, Madagascar, and Cam Rahn Bay, French Indochina, for crew rest, repairs, and replenishment. This passage thus appears to be a thinly-veiled rationalization for the Soviet Navy's need for exclusive access privileges around Africa. Indeed, the relevance of Africa to Soviet planning for a Sino-Soviet War was made all the more transparent by publication on the page opposite the excerpt cited above of a map of the tsarist fleet's voyage around Africa.

In addition, a close reading of Soviet diplomatic initiatives in the Yemens and Somalia during the

early 1970s reveals how sensitive the Soviets were to Chinese influence.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, Soviet moves, particularly in Somalia, seemed designed to preempt the Chinese from developing a military relationship with the Siad Barre government. Although Soviet sensitivity to Chinese influence in the region remained strong through the remainder of the decade,<sup>6</sup> it has ebbed over time as the Soviet military buildup in the Far East reduced to need for rapid reinforcement of supplies along the African sea lanes, and as the dangers of a war with China subsided in the 1980s.

Nevertheless, the Soviets remain concerned about the security of their maritime commerce through the Bab al-Mandab, and their anxieties in this regard seem to heighten whenever the Arabs raise the concept of turning the Red Sea into an "Arab Lake," as they did during the Taiz, Yemen Arab Republic, meeting of Arab leaders in March 1977. Qadhdhafi's recent call for a Sahel Arab Union, which would establish Arab sovereignty and control from the Atlantic to the Persian Gulf,<sup>7</sup> may have aroused similar concerns among the Soviets, especially if they viewed his remarks in the context of the probable Libyan mining of the Red Sea in 1984. Although the immediate objective of such schemes is the denial of Israel's access through the Red Sea, the Soviets also see them as a potential threat to their own freedom of navigation along this vital waterway. Indeed, one of the reasons the Soviets have remained steadfast in their support of Ethiopia's territorial integrity, even in the period of declining Soviet support for the Ethiopian war effort in the north, is the fear that an independent Eritrea would probably come under Arab influence, and might eventually cooperate with Arab plans to limit international navigation through the Red Sea. In view of these potential threats, it is not surprising that Israel and the Soviet Union have found common cause in supporting Ethiopia's territorial integrity.

Whereas the USSR's strong stake in protecting its sea lines of communication through the Red Sea is usually ignored in Western commentaries, the potential threat of Soviet interdiction of Western tanker traffic through these waters in the event of a global war has received far greater attention. Certainly, the Soviets have the capability to mine the Bab al-Mandab and sink tankers, but this does not say much about their combat capabilities, since

tankers can be sunk by RPGs fired from Arab Dhows, and mining can be accomplished by cargo vessels. Whether the Soviets would employ their naval capabilities for such missions depends on how they assess their most effective use of naval and air forces in the area in the event of a major war.

The issue will always remain in doubt, for probably even the Soviets cannot know beforehand whether their Indian Ocean Squadron would even remain in the area in the event of a major wartime crisis, much less how they would prioritize their targets if the Squadron remained. Since the Soviet Indian Ocean Squadron consists of older, less combat-capable warships, presumably the Soviets would have less need for them in more demanding, higher priority missions closer to home waters, and, hence, one might expect these ships to be assigned to combat missions in the area. Assuming that Western warships remained in the Indian Ocean and were not redeployed to European or Asian waters during a crisis leading to war, these ships would be a high value target, along with Western base facilities, such as Diego Garcia and Oman's Masirah Island, etc. If the Soviets believed that they could maneuver their combatants close enough to Western warships during a crisis leading to war (as they did in the Mediterranean during the October 1973 War) in order to be able to inflict significant damage once hostilities had erupted, they might then conclude that this mission would be worth the predictable destruction of their own combatants.

The Soviet Navy, in fact, continues to justify its out-of-area deployments in part as enhancing Soviet strategic warning against US surprise attacks and as contributing to the "battle of the first salvo."<sup>8</sup> Indeed, when US carrier battle groups deploy in the northern Arabian Sea within air combat range of Soviet territory, they come under surveillance of Soviet warships and auxiliary vessels. In recent years, however, US warships in the Indian Ocean have demonstrated their ability to "lose" Soviet tailing ships. This might eventually reduce Soviet confidence in their ability to close with Western warships during a crisis, and hence might force them to reconsider the suitability of their ships for this mission.

If the Soviets decided that their warships would not be able to inflict serious damage against Western combatants (presumably the Soviets would still tar-

get them with their land-based bomber aircraft), the Soviet Indian Ocean Squadron could be used to strike Western military installations at Diego Garcia, Oman, Somalia, and possibly Djibouti. Here again, the Soviets would have to calculate whether their warships would be able survive long enough to inflict enough damage against these installations to make the mission worth undertaking.

A third possible target would be the interdiction of oil supplies. There are several ways the Soviets could accomplish this: mining of the Strait of Hormuz and the Bab al-Mandab, sabotage of the Suez Canal, targeting of oil tankers, terminals and pipelines, and even the assassination of key technical personnel. Most of the shore-based missions could be accomplished by Spetsnaz commando units without the support of the Soviet Navy. For example, Soviet commandos could be flown into the area, possibly as replacements for civilian crews aboard fishing trawlers and other civilian vessels, and later disembarked nearer to the oil terminals.<sup>9</sup> The Soviet Indian Squadron could be used to mine ports and choke points, though this task could also be accomplished perhaps just as easily by civilian vessels or aircraft.

However, mining of the Bab al-Mandab, whose main channel is over 16 kilometers wide at its narrowest point and 311 meters deep,<sup>10</sup> does not appear to be easy to accomplish satisfactorily, if the Bab al-Mandab littoral remained in Western control. If the West had sufficient mine clearing assets available for this purpose, the mine fields could be cleared within a few weeks. Moreover, mining does not appear to be as useful a means of interdicting oil supplies as destroying oil terminals. In fact, the development and expansion of oil pipelines to Yanbu on Saudi Arabia's Red Sea coast,<sup>11</sup> and through Turkey and Syria, has reduced the significance of the Bab al-Mandab and Strait of Hormuz choke points. It has been estimated that by the mid-1990s approximately, 7 mbd of oil produced on the Arabian Peninsula and Iraq could be exported via Red Sea terminals, by-passing the Bab al-Mandab. Destroying the oil terminal and storage facilities at Yanbu would seem, therefore, to hold a higher priority than mining the Bab al-Mandab.

Although targeting supertankers remains a final possible mission of Soviet warships, it too is doubtful. In a crisis leading to a war, tankers might well

put into protected ports and would not return to sea without naval escort or until the Soviets had been swept from the seas. Moreover, tankers might be just as easily targeted by civilian vessels, or even commando or proxy forces using RPGs from Arab dhows. Thus, even if the Soviets opt to interdict the flow of oil to the West from the Gulf, they are not likely to waste their naval forces in traditional anti-ship missions. The most efficient and potentially effective approach towards interdicting oil supplies would be through sabotage of terminals, pipelines and storage facilities carried out by Spetsnaz or specially-trained proxy guerrilla forces.

Another mission that the Soviet warships in the Indian Ocean will probably not perform in the foreseeable future is hunting US ballistic missile submarines. Although speculation about the presence of US SSBNs in the Indian Ocean has been rife ever since Geoffrey Jukes pointed out in 1972 the potential advantages of *Polaris* and *Poseidon* missile submarines using the northern Arabian Sea to fire at targets in the USSR and Western China,<sup>12</sup> the speculation has been unfounded. Jukes discounted the fact that the long transits between the home bases and the Indian Ocean would leave US SSBNs out of range of their targets for long periods.<sup>13</sup> The Soviets have often played up a US SSBN threat in the Indian Ocean as part of a larger propaganda campaign directed mainly at Third World audiences and designed to rationalize their own naval presence, while casting the US military presence in a negative light.<sup>14</sup>

In fact, the Soviet Navy in the Indian Ocean does not perform, nor is it configured to perform, anti-submarine warfare (ASW) missions. No deep water ASW exercises have been carried out by the Soviet Navy in the Indian Ocean. And the ships that comprise the Indian Ocean Squadron are general purpose forces, not those used by the Soviets when they do engage in ASW exercises closer to home waters.<sup>15</sup> Although the Soviets have replaced the combatants comprising their Indian Ocean Squadron with more modern ships possessing better ASW capabilities, they have yet to conduct open ocean ASW operations in the Indian Ocean. Another indication that the Soviets do not practice deep water ASW operations in the Indian Ocean is the employment of shorter range Il-38 May ASW planes for surveillance against Western "hunter-

killer" submarines and general reconnaissance missions. If the Soviets were to practice open ocean ASW surveillance, they would presumably replace these planes with their longer range Tu-142 Bear F ASW planes. Thus, none of the peacetime activities of the Soviet Indian Ocean Squadron suggest that it has an ASW mission. To sum up, all that can be said is that the Soviet Indian Ocean Squadron does not possess clearly-defined anti-SLOC (sea lines of communications) or anti-ASW missions—the roles which are often attributed to it. In fact, the Squadron's wartime role remains unclear. What is more certain is that the Squadron is not a highly combat-capable force. Even with the active assistance of local client states,<sup>16</sup> it would be exposed and vulnerable to Western attack, and would not likely be able to survive the outbreak of hostilities for very long.

If the Soviet Indian Ocean Squadron appears to be less of a threat than many have assumed, then it follows that the value of the shore-based facilities which have supported the Squadron should be similarly discounted. This is not to deny the importance of the logistics and maintenance support these facilities provide in peacetime. The use of these facilities has enabled the Soviets to double the length of their combatant deployments in the Indian Ocean. This has enabled them to meet their force requirements with a smaller inventory of ships, thereby reducing operating costs as well as freeing units for other assignments. In addition, the availability of shore-based support has enabled the Soviets to employ older, less capable surface combatants, such as the *Petya* class frigates, hence extending their useful service beyond the point they would normally be scrapped or exported.

The Soviets also operated a long-range high frequency communications station at Berbera until 1977, and at Aden since then. The communications station has been used to relay messages between the USSR and Soviet forward deployed naval forces.<sup>17</sup> It is also conceivable that the Soviets have used their land and sea based assets to intercept military communications of Western military forces.

We should also note that the Soviets have used airfields in the region to stage routine surveillance flights, mainly by Il-38 May ASW planes, and, on rare occasion, by long range Tu-95 Bear D recon-

naissance aircraft (e.g. from Somalia's Dafet airfield in 1976.)<sup>18</sup>

The military importance of Soviet naval support facilities in the region, moreover, is not limited to their role in peacetime. We know that in developing an infrastructure at Berbera in the 1970s, Moscow built in certain capabilities designed to support Soviet air combat operations, even though no Soviet strike aircraft was ever deployed there. The so-called "missile handling and storage" facility that they built at Berbera was capable of handling a wide range of air and sea launched conventional tactical missiles as well as other ordnance far more sophisticated than those the Somalis had or were ever likely to receive.<sup>19</sup> The ordnance storage facility's proximity to both the large airfield then under construction and the port suggests its potential use for both naval combatants and bomber aircraft.

What contingencies the Soviets had in mind when they built into their support infrastructure at Berbera the capability to support strike aircraft remain a mystery. At the time, no conceivable regional scenario would have justified their use. Moreover, with the rudimentary air defense capabilities the Soviets had installed at Berbera (i.e. a few SA-2 and SA-3 missiles), any Soviet aircraft stationed there would have been vulnerable to attack. In a previous paper, I have speculated that the Soviets might have been preparing for contingent use of Berbera to stage an attack with their older and less valuable Tu-16 Badger G bombers against the Sixth Fleet in the Eastern Mediterranean.<sup>20</sup> It is just as likely that they had no specific scenario in mind and simply replicated an existing storage facility in the USSR without anticipating the negative publicity the facility's public exposure later garnered as a result of the US Defense Department's disclosures in June 1975.

If the construction of the ordnance facility at Berbera was ill-considered, then the Soviets appear to have learned their lesson. Since their expulsion from Berbera, they have not built comparable ordnance storage facilities elsewhere in the region, or, for that matter, in the Third World.

The military benefits the Soviets have derived from their facilities in the region appear to be rather modest. Their limited need for naval access, nevertheless, appears to have impelled them to make military aid commitments that they might have

preferred to avoid, hence distorting their policy in the region. In the early 1970s, when they decided to buy access to Somali facilities with modern weapons, they ignored the warnings of their specialists about the dangers of dealing with an irredentist regime.<sup>21</sup> They seem to have taken a calculated risk that a strong US-backed Ethiopia would deter any Somali military adventures. The 1974 Ethiopian revolution, which eventually altered the military balance on the Horn, took them by surprise. Even in the mid-1970s, when the unstable situation in Ethiopia aroused Somali nationalism, the Soviets did not temper their military aid for Somalia. Rather, they increased it in exchange for additional access privileges, while securing Somalia's pledge, written into their 1974 friendship treaty, to use that aid for "defensive purposes" only. Without the need for naval access, the Soviets would never have aligned themselves so closely with what the rest of Africa regarded as a "pariah" state. Had the Soviets not furnished Somalia with the wherewithal to fight a major war, at a minimum, the scale of the conflict would have been far smaller, and at best, the war might have been avoided altogether.

Today, however, the Soviets have more access options than they did a decade ago when they felt compelled to turn to Somalia for support of their Indian Ocean Squadron. They have succeeded in placing their access "eggs" in two baskets, Ethiopia and the PDRY, instead of one. And this has improved their bargaining power with each donor. Moreover, they have learned from their Somali experience about the impermanence of Third World friendships. They have, therefore, built "down" their naval support infrastructure in Ethiopia's Dahlac islands, which replaced Berbera as the Soviet Navy's principal Indian Ocean logistic and maintenance base. The Dahlac complex contains easily movable equipment, such as the same 8,500 ton floating drydock they had previously stationed at Berbera, floating piers, water and fuel storage tanks.<sup>22</sup> In addition, once the Soviets deploy the Tag D, the new large sea plane they are developing as a replacement for the Il-38 May ASW planes, they will no longer need to use local airfields to stage maritime reconnaissance flights.<sup>23</sup> This would also dampen whatever interest the Soviet Navy may have once had in the Ethiopian Army's pacification of

Eritrea, which would have secured their use of Asmara airfield and might have enabled them to shift some of their naval support activities ashore to Massawa.

With "gunboat diplomacy" now out of favor in Moscow, it is conceivable that under certain circumstances, the Soviets may no longer see fit to maintain a continuous naval presence in these waters. To raise one possibility, should an international agreement regulating freedom of passage through the Red Sea and Bab al-Mandab be reached with appropriate international guarantees, the Soviets might decide to deploy their warships on an intermittent basis, perhaps participating in naval exercises (e.g. mine clearing, etc.) with other nations possessing maritime interests in the region.

Another possible stimulus for a reduced Soviet naval presence would be a scaling back of US naval deployments in the Indian Ocean, perhaps to the level of the mid-1970s, when carrier battle groups were rotated with surface action groups on an intermittent basis. This assumes, of course, that a reduction of tensions in the Gulf region would permit this to happen. Without a crisis in the Gulf, the US Navy might be willing to restrict its operating zone short of the northern Arabian Sea, thereby assuaging a Soviet concern about a potential strategic threat posed by US carrier-based aviation to the Soviet homeland.

Such a reduction of the Soviet naval presence in the Indian Ocean would, in turn, reduce significantly the needs of the Soviet Navy for local shore-based support. Indeed, the Soviet Navy might be able to get by as it did before 1972 without routine access to naval support facilities ashore. But even if such a naval force reduction does not take place, the Soviet Navy's need for local shore-based support in the region has declined markedly since the 1970s, and will continue to decline with the introduction of the Tag D seaplanes into service.

### **US Interests**

US strategic interests in the region basically center on two objectives: 1) the use of land-based facilities to support US military operations in the Southwest Asia-Indian Ocean area in peacetime and in wartime contingencies; and, 2) freedom of international navigation through the Red Sea/Bab al-Mandab. Of the two, the military role of the Horn of Africa has

received far greater attention and is of greater salience. Historically, military objectives have always been a major factor in US involvement in the region. For over two decades, the US operated the Kagnew military communications station at Asmara. Although it once played an important role in the worldwide US military communications system, by the early 1970s it had been rendered technologically obsolete by satellite communications as well as the development of what was then an "austere" naval communications station at Diego Garcia. Shortly before the Ogaden War, the US closed Kagnew station, hence removing an important underpinning of the US presence in the region. With the cessation of the 25-year-old US military assistance program in Ethiopia in 1977, US dealings with the new Mengistu government rapidly unravelled, and they have remained minimal since then.

With the abrogation of the Soviet-Somali friendship treaty in November 1977 and the withdrawal of Somali regular forces from the Ogaden in February-March 1978, a new phase in US policy in the region, centered on Somalia, began. Although discussions about military aid to Somalia began in 1978, it was the collapse of the Shah of Iran and the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in 1979 which gave impetus to the development of a military relationship, codified in the 1980 US-Somalia security assistance agreement. It provided for \$65 million worth of US military credits and grants to be used in defense of Somalia's territorial integrity.<sup>24</sup> The agreement also provided for the development and use by US armed forces of naval and air facilities at Berbera and Mogadishu. As of 1985, the US government had appropriated \$54 million for improvements of the airfields and port facilities at these locations, as well as the addition of POL (petroleum, oils, and lubricants) storage and distribution facilities at Berbera.<sup>25</sup>

This amount was five times less than what the US spent on developing facilities in Oman, a ratio that reflects the far greater importance of that country in US military preparations for Southwest Asian contingencies.<sup>26</sup> At present, Somalia plays a limited role, primarily in support of reconnaissance and logistic flights. Some of the flights from Berbera are for surveillance of Soviet naval units in the area. On occasion, the US has been able to use Djibouti's airfield for such purposes. US aircraft have also

been permitted to use open Somali territory to practice low-level bombing runs. The value of port facilities for crew rest remains extremely limited, given the poverty of the country, the lack of attractions and amenities, and the spread of disease. Even before US-Somali relations became strained over the genocidal fighting in northern Somalia, it was often difficult to schedule liberty visits, due, in part, to the reluctance of sailors to go ashore.

Until recently, Berbera's potential role in supporting wartime contingencies was considered to be far more important than its peacetime utility. Somalia agreed to permit the US to store war materiel at Berbera, which in the event of a wartime crisis could have been used as a major staging area to join deployed US combat forces with their supplies. Berbera was not the first choice for this role, since it is located relatively far away from the expected location of disembarkation in the Persian Gulf. However, the reluctance of other countries, such as Egypt and the Sudan, to permit the storage of US materiel on satisfactory terms meant that the US found itself with no practical alternative to Berbera. Hence, as long as the ability to deploy in strength US combat troops in Southwest Asian crisis contingencies was a cornerstone of our military posture in the area, the storage, airfield and port facilities at Berbera were deemed to be important.

As a result of the recent policy review, the Pentagon's Defense Planning Guidance has dramatically reduced the Soviet military threat to the Persian Gulf and concluded that preparations to defend against Soviet invasion of Iran were no longer necessary.<sup>27</sup> Planning for Persian Gulf crises would now be geared towards coping with "unspecified aggression," presumably involving regional powers. The elimination of the worst case Soviet invasion threat has probably removed the need to prepare for large scale deployments of US combat forces into the countries. Both superpowers are now forced to consider whether their military access privileges could be relinquished in an environment of improving East-West relations and budgetary pressures to cut military spending.

The US Defense Department's ability to employ the Somali facilities in peacetime has been constrained by the punitive campaigns against the Issa tribes in the north and the chaotic political conditions in the country. Even with the suspension of

military aid to the Siad Barre government, it has been very difficult for the US to disassociate its military activities in Somalia from that government's repugnant policies. For example, the repair of US-used military communications links from Mogadishu to Hargeisa in mid-1988 was regarded, rightly or wrongly, as assisting the Somali army's military campaign in northern Somalia at the time. Given the current political situation in the country, the US Congress would probably find it most difficult to approve renewal of the US-Somali security assistance agreement. However, the treaty may remain in force beyond its expiration date even if neither side formally requests its renewal. Given the present strains in US-Somali relations, inaction on renewing the treaty may be the only way it will survive.

The US is also committed to safeguarding freedom of navigation through international straits, such as the Bab al-Mandab. It has participated in multi-national mine clearing operations in the Gulf of Suez in 1974 and in the Red Sea a decade later, following the mining of the area apparently by a Libyan cargo vessel.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, the US has made a formal commitment to the protection of Israeli passage through and over the Red Sea and Bab al-Mandab. The 1975 Memorandum of Agreement between the Governments of Israel and the United States stipulates:

*In accordance with the principle of freedom of navigation on the high seas and free and unimpeded passage through and over straits connecting international waters, the United States Government regards the Straits of the Bab al-Mandab and the Strait of Gibraltar as international waterways. It will support Israel's right to free and unimpeded passage through such straits and will support diplomatically the exercise of that right.<sup>29</sup>*

This agreement was signed in the course of the disengagement negotiations following the October 1973 War, in which Egyptian warships blockaded Israeli shipping through the Bab al-Mandab. According to one legal scholar, this formulation ensuring Israel's free passage through and over the Bab al-Mandab is broader than the concept of "transit passage" stipulated in the Draft Convention of the Third UN Law of the Sea Conference.<sup>30</sup> It hence

raises the prospect that the US could find itself one day internationally isolated in supporting future Israeli military actions in and over the Bab al-Mandab. This is an exceedingly remote possibility, however, as the following discussion of Israeli interests in the region should make clear.

### Israeli Interests

Israel's strategic interests in the region focus on freedom of navigation through the Red Sea and the Bab al-Mandab. Although 90 percent of Israel's maritime trade is handled by its Mediterranean ports, the Red Sea route is important nonetheless. At one time most of Israel's oil imports arrived from Iran via this waterway. But after the fall of the Shah, the Islamic government in Teheran cut off regular oil supplies. Thereafter, Israel decided to diversify its sources of oil so that no more than one quarter of its imports would come from any single source. (Egypt supplies approximately one quarter of Israel's oil imports.)<sup>31</sup> Israel also decided to rely more heavily on coal imports from South Africa and Australia to satisfy its energy requirements. These coal deliveries as well as other raw material imports reach Israel via the Bab al-Mandab.

Israeli shipping through the Bab al-Mandab has faced several threats in the past. In 1971 a 30,000-ton Liberian oiler, *Coral Sea*, chartered by Israel and carrying oil for Eilat, was fired upon, but not sunk, by a group of terrorists from a launch operating from South Yemen's Perim island. The PFLP took credit for the attack. This incident may have been intended to demonstrate that Israeli access to the Red Sea and Indian Ocean depended on more than their control of Sharm el-Sheikh and the Strait of Tiran, which was then a disputed issue. During the October 1973 War the Arabs once again tried to take advantage of Israel's vulnerability by conducting an Egyptian naval blockade at the Bab al-Mandab. The blockade was lifted by December 1973 without Israel ever trying to challenge it.<sup>32</sup> However, this blockade proved to be effective, for by the end of the war Israel's oil stocks were badly depleted. Israel's pressing need for oil was indicated by Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir's insistence on lifting the blockade as a primary condition for any relief of Israeli pressure on the encircled Egyptian Third Army.<sup>33</sup>

Partly to reduce her vulnerability to another Arab blockade, Israel decided to develop air tankers to extend the range of her fighters. In addition, the introduction of long range *Reshef* class missile boats means that the Bab al-Mandab is now within reach of Israeli sea-based air power. No further challenge specifically to Israeli shipping through the Bab al-Mandab has been mounted,<sup>34</sup> which is probably due as much to the changed diplomatic situation in the Middle East following the October 1973 War as to the emergence of Israel's long range military capabilities and the 1975 US guarantee of Israel's freedom of navigation through the Bab al-Mandab.

It may be added that even Israel's adversary in the region, the PDRY, has modified its position on international navigation through the Bab al-Mandab in a way that could be objectively interpreted as being more accommodating to Israeli interests, although this was probably not the PDRY's intention. The initially restrictive PDRY position was articulated at the 1974 Law of the Sea Conference. The PDRY representative stated that the PDRY's territorial sea extended to the Bab al-Mandab and that the right of innocent passage through the Bab al-Mandab applied only to civilian commercial vessels, not to foreign warships, which should require prior authorization by the PDRY.<sup>35</sup> The air space over the Bab al-Mandab was also regarded as part of the PDRY's territorial sea and under its exclusive jurisdiction. In 1978, however, the PDRY enunciated a more liberal policy on this issue:

*Being well aware of the great importance of the Strait of the Bab al-Mandab to all peoples and States of the world as an international waterway which has long been used for international navigation, and of its important strategic location as a link between the international traffic lines, and believing in the importance of keeping international navigation through this vital strait free for the benefit of the peoples and States of the area in particular and the international community in general, the Government of the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen confirms its respect for the freedom of navigation of maritime and air traffic of ships and aircraft of all coastal and non-coastal States, without prejudice to the sovereignty, integrity, security and independence of the Republic.*<sup>36</sup>



Although it seems probable that this policy shift was designed mainly to accommodate Soviet airlifts and shipments of supplies and Cuban military personnel to Ethiopia during the Ogaden War, its wording applies to all states, presumably including Israel as well. Hence, it removes a potential source of friction between Israel and the PDRY.

On balance, then, it would appear that the threats to Israeli shipping through the Bab al-Mandab were not serious in the past, and are even less so today. Nor, for that matter, is this waterway as important to Israel as it once was when Israel relied heavily on imports of oil from Iran.

### **French Interests**

Like other West European states, France has a strong interest in freedom of navigation along the sea routes surrounding the Horn of Africa. According to some estimates, roughly 70 percent of the oil from the Persian Gulf is shipped to Western Europe along these waterways through the Bab al-Mandab and around the Cape of Good Hope.<sup>37</sup>

In the past, moreover, France had been heavily dependent on the imports of oil from the Persian Gulf. By 1978, France's imports of Persian Gulf oil accounted for 44 percent of its total energy consumption, and 70 percent of its oil imports.<sup>38</sup> This meant that France relied on Persian Gulf oil to meet its energy requirements more than any other West European country. However, this energy dependence has declined markedly as a result of the expansion of France's nuclear energy program and its diversification of the sources of crude oil supplies in the 1980s. Imports from the Gulf region averaged only one-third of France's total imports of crude oil for the years 1986 through 1988.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, by 1986, oil imports accounted for only 42.6 percent of France's energy requirements.<sup>40</sup> This meant that by the late 1980s, Persian Gulf oil met roughly 16 percent of France's total energy requirements. In addition, as increasing use has been made of the oil pipelines from the Gulf region to terminals along Saudi Arabia's Red Sea coast and the Mediterranean coasts of Turkey and Syria, the proportion of Gulf oil reaching France and other West European countries via the sea lanes adjacent the Horn of Africa has declined commensurately.

Despite the declining importance of the Bab al-Mandab as a conduit for France's oil supplies, this

strait remains important nevertheless, since it lies astride the fastest route to French territories in the Indian Ocean and the Western Pacific.

Threats to French shipping through the Bab al-Mandab have remained minimal. In one incident in 1972 a French destroyer en route to goodwill visits to Arab ports in the region was shelled from Perim island.<sup>41</sup> No other incidents have been reported.

Through its military presence at Djibouti, France has the ability to respond more rapidly to threats in the Bab al-Mandab than any other state. The French Indian Ocean Squadron is normally based in Reunion, but often visits Djibouti. It usually includes 12 combatants and an aircraft carrier.<sup>42</sup> In addition, the French garrison at Djibouti numbers 4,500 troops, supported by a squadron of 12 fighters. This concentration of French military power near the Bab al-Mandab is probably more than enough to counter any likely threats to the latter's security.

The French military presence in Djibouti, moreover, appears to be secure, for without it, Djibouti would probably cease to exist as an independent state. Indeed, when Djibouti gained independence in 1977, it was widely assumed that without the retention of a French military garrison, Djibouti would become engulfed in a war between Somalia and Ethiopia, which have conflicting interests in that country.<sup>43</sup> Also, with a population of only 400,000, Djibouti is heavily dependent on French budgetary and technical assistance. In fact, over 60 percent of Djibouti's teachers are French citizens. There are over 10,000 French citizens, including 6,300 military personnel and their dependents, residing in Djibouti.<sup>44</sup> Djibouti and its sizeable French presence could indeed be considered a separate French interest in itself.

### **Egyptian Interests**

As the proprietor of the Suez Canal, Egypt obviously has a major stake, no less significant than the major users of these waterways, in the freedom of international navigation through the Red Sea and Bab al-Mandab. In addition, Egypt has a unique interest in the Horn of Africa, since over 80 percent of the waters of its Nile river lifeblood originate in the Ethiopian highlands.

Historically, the Egyptians and their British rulers before them took an active interest in ensuring that the headwaters of the Blue Nile would not be

diverted, although many have interpreted this interest as a pretext for interference in the internal affairs of Ethiopia. Protocols regarding the free flow of these waters were signed between Britain and the Ethiopian Emperor Menelik II in 1902 and again in 1925 between Britain and Italy.<sup>45</sup> The Egyptians have also expressed concern about Marxist Ethiopia's policies in this regard. In May 1978, soon after the Soviets and Cubans had helped Ethiopia's newly-installed Marxist military regime led by Lt Col Mengistu Haile Mariam to rout the Somali armed forces in the Ogaden, Sadat warned: "we depend upon the Nile 100 percent in our life, so if anyone, at any moment, thinks to deprive us of our life we shall never hesitate [to go to war] because it is a matter of life or death."<sup>46</sup> Fears about a potential Ethiopian threat to the Nile may have induced Egyptian leaders to support Somalia and the Eritrean insurgency.

In reality, neither the Mengistu government nor its predecessors have undertaken any projects which would have diverted the waters of the Blue Nile. There have been surveys of the tributaries of the Blue Nile conducted with US assistance between 1957 and 1964, which recommended water storage, hydroelectric power generation and irrigation projects, but apparently none of these projects was ever implemented.<sup>47</sup> In the 1970s, Ethiopian irrigation experts assumed that their agricultural water needs from the Blue Nile and the Atbara river (which flows into the Nile in the Sudan) would reach 4 billion cubic meters per year. Additionally, how the droughts of the 1980s may have altered these estimates is difficult to ascertain. Although the possibility of unilateral Ethiopian initiatives in this area cannot be ruled out,<sup>48</sup> it is more probable that any project to develop the water resources of the Upper Nile basin would be worked out in consultation and coordination with the riparian states involved.

Even without the initiation of any major Ethiopian water projects, the flow of Nile water to Egypt has undoubtedly diminished as a result of the droughts in Ethiopia and the Sudan in recent years, a natural calamity which Egypt can do virtually nothing about. Egypt can do far more to control the adequacy of its water supply through its own conservation efforts.

### **Saudi Arabian Interests**

As a major oil exporter and importer of goods from Western Europe and the United States, Saudi Arabia obviously has a stake in freedom of navigation through the Bab al-Mandab. As noted above, the development and expansion of the oil pipeline to Yanbu has reduced the importance of this waterway. By the mid-1990s, over half of Saudi Arabia's crude oil production could be exported via the Red Sea, thus by-passing the Bab al-Mandab entirely. Although Saudi Arabia's economic stake in this strait may be waning, its political interest in the Horn of Africa has so far remained strong.

For two decades, Saudi Arabia has sought to eliminate the Soviet presence on both sides of the Bab al-Mandab. The Saudis considered both the Soviets and their Marxist-oriented client states in the region a threat to Islam as well as to their own and other conservative Arab monarchies in the Gulf. They also feared that the unification of the Yemens under a radical leftist regime would pose a direct threat to the Saudi political and social systems.

In the Horn of Africa, the Saudis encouraged Somalia to expel the Soviets in the 1970s, and later supported the Eritrean rebels mainly because it weakened Ethiopia's Marxist regime. This occurred despite the fact that the Eritrean Popular Liberation Front (EPLF), the main fighting force, is Marxist-oriented. Although the Saudi position regarding Eritrean independence remains ambiguous, they had earlier supported the scheme of turning the Red Sea into an Arab Lake, which envisions an independent, Arab-oriented Eritrea.

While the Saudis continue to regard the Mengistu regime with hostility, it is unclear how much they have changed their thinking about the Soviet Union under Gorbachev. Certainly, the establishment of a dialogue between the Soviets and the Saudis about their respective policies in the region might go far towards removing elements of confrontation and hostility that have plagued the countries on both sides of the Bab al-Mandab for decades.

### **Conclusions**

In the summary table following this chapter, the discrete strategic interests of the external states are reviewed and assigned the values that these states might currently place on their interests. How those values may have changed over time is also es-

timated. In addition, the significance of the vulnerability of these interests to threats and how the importance of these threats may have changed are evaluated.

As the table indicates, freedom of navigation through the Bab al-Mandab remains important to all the states reviewed, although the reasons for its importance vary, such as the viability of the southern sea route for the USSR or oil shipping for France. In addition, the US and Saudi Arabia have less directly at stake in this issue than the other states. Nevertheless, as a superpower adhering to the principle of freedom of navigation through international straits and having pledged to support Israel's exercise of this right in the Bab al-Mandab, the US commitment to freedom of navigation through the Bab al-Mandab remains strong. What has changed is the economic importance of this waterway, which has declined mainly because of the development and expansion of oil pipelines and terminals by-passing the Strait of Hormuz and the Bab al-Mandab.

On balance, the strategic importance of the Bab al-Mandab and the Horn of Africa seems to be declining and the threats to these interests seem less serious than many observers may have earlier assumed. The economic importance of the Bab al-Mandab as an oil shipping lane has declined with the development and expansion of oil pipelines along the Red Sea coast which bypass this strait.

So far, the threats to maritime traffic through these waters do not appear to have been very impressive. The worst incident was the 1984 mining of the Red Sea, which involved 190 mines, evidently recent Soviet export versions.<sup>49</sup> Although these mines damaged, but did not sink, 19 ships of 15 different nations, they were soon cleared by 26 ships from six different states. After dropping to a low of 42 ships per day in early August, maritime traffic returned to normal (about 60 ships per day) within one month of the mining. The voyage of only one ship was cancelled as a result of the mining. Given the limited damage, especially in comparison with the simultaneous destruction of tankers during the "tanker war" in the Gulf, Lloyd's of London never bothered to raise its insurance rates for ships transiting the Red Sea. At worst, the mining incident was a nuisance, not a crippling blow to international navigation.

Whether the Soviets or their allies would mine these waters in wartime, much less how effective the mining would be, remain highly speculative issues. As I indicated above, if the Soviets should opt to expand their combat forces in the region, they probably have higher priority objectives to target, such as Western combat forces, military facilities, oil pipelines and terminals. And even if they did mine the straits, it would probably not be very effective. Gulf oil can now reach the West through far more diverse routes than in the past. Moreover, during the initial phase of a global war, the West would probably depend on more secure sources of oil (such as the US, Canada, Alaska, Latin America, and Nigeria) located closer to refineries in the US and Europe. (This scenario assumes, of course, that the Soviets are still capable of fighting a protracted general war, an assumption which appears to be increasingly unwarranted in light of the momentous changes that have taken place recently in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.)

The military support facilities used by the Soviet Union in Ethiopia and the US in Somalia represent another strategic interest, but their importance to the Superpowers seems to be declining. A comparison of the rudimentary and moveable installations the Soviets built in the Dahlacs with the far more elaborate ones they abandoned at Berbera underlines the declining operational and political significance of naval support facilities in the region for the USSR.

Indeed, it is possible that the Soviets may be preparing to leave their Dahlac Islands support base. This is suggested by a Western newspaper report that Soviet deputy foreign minister Yuli M. Vorontsov informed Mengistu in Addis Ababa in November 1989 that the USSR would end its "military treaty" with Ethiopia when the accord expires in 1991.<sup>50</sup> Presumably the Soviet-Ethiopian military cooperation agreement covers both military assistance and naval access arrangements. Should the Soviets scale down their naval presence in the Indian Ocean and shift to intermittent deployment schedules, it would make relinquishing naval access privileges in Ethiopia far easier. Such a development would be consistent with Gorbachev's expressed interest in reducing naval force deployments in distant waters and eliminating overseas bases.

US access privileges in Somalia would appear to be similarly expendable. Now that the projection of major concentrations of US combat forces into the region has been deemed to be unnecessary due to the dissipated Soviet threat, the Defense Department might recommend termination of a largely superfluous access agreement with Somalia. Although the cost savings would probably not be significant, extricating the US from political chaos and internecine bloodshed in Somalia might be seen as an act of statesmanship, especially if it induced or rewarded the Soviets for withdrawing from Ethiopia.

For the time being, both US and Soviet ongoing military support activities in Somalia and Ethiopia, respectively, are being jeopardized by the growing political chaos in these countries. Both superpowers are now forced to consider whether their military access privileges could be relinquished in an environment of improving East-West relations and budgetary pressures to cut military spending. Recognizing that global strategic interests in the region, as well as any threats to them, are of declining importance should assist US and Soviet policymakers in reassessing their respective security policies in the area.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>From Odessa to Vladivostok, it is 11,000 nautical miles by sea through the Suez Canal-Red Sea and 17,000 miles around the Cape route. At an average speed of 14 knots, it takes 32 days by the shorter route through the Suez Canal and 50 days by the longer route to make this voyage. The time saved in using the Suez Canal is greater for the Soviet Union than any other European state.

<sup>2</sup>James T. Westwood, "Soviet Maritime Strategy and Transportation," *Naval War College Review* (November-December 1985): 47.

<sup>3</sup>Compare Suez Canal Authority *Suez Canal Reports* for 1981 and 1987.

<sup>4</sup>See Admiral Sergei Gorshkov, *Morskaya Moshch' Gosudarstva* (Sea Power of the State) (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1976): 152.

<sup>5</sup>For further detail, see LCDR Charles T. Creekman, Jr., USN, "Sino-Soviet Competition in the Yemens," *Naval War College Review* (July-August 1979): 79-83; Richard B. Rennek, "The Soviet-Somali 'Arms for Access' Relationship," *Soviet Union* 10, part 1 (1983): 59-81.

<sup>6</sup>It is worth noting that the 1979 Soviet treaty with the PDRY is the only treaty the Soviets have signed with a Third World state which contains a thinly-veiled anti-Chinese reference. Article seven calls "for the elimination from the practice of international relations of any manifestation of the policy of hegemonism and expansionism." See *Pravda*, 26 October 1989. Salim Rubai Ali, the PDRY President deposed and executed in a July 1978 coup, was widely regarded as being pro-Chinese.

<sup>7</sup>Tripoli JANA in Arabic (17 February 1989). Translation by the Foreign Broadcast Information Service. *Africa Report*, 21 February 1989, 4.

<sup>8</sup>See the interview with the Soviet Navy Commander-in-Chief Admiral Chernavin in "Flot--Rodom Iz Oktiabria (The Navy: Born of October)," *Voennyi Vestnik* (February 1988): 19. In a similar vein, an authoritative Soviet book on the Navy favors forward deployments of warships so that they could be ready "to use their weapons quickly when war starts." See Rear Admiral Nikolai P. V'iunenko, Captain First Rank Boris N. Makeev, and Captain First Rank Valentin D. Skugarev, *Voenno-Morskoi Flot: Rol', Perspektivy, Razvitiia, Ispol'zovanie* (The Navy: Its Role, Prospects, Developments, and Uses) (Moscow: Voennoe Izdatel'stvo, 1988), 237; as cited in Norman Cigar "The Navy's Battle of the Budget: Soviet Style," *US Naval Institute Proceedings* (forthcoming).

<sup>9</sup>For further discussion of this contingency, see the author's "Soviet Strategic Military Interests in Africa in the 1980s," *Final Report* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: US Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, 1986), 6ff.

<sup>10</sup>See Ruth Lapidot-Eschelbacher, *The Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1982), 132.

<sup>11</sup>The 48 inch pipeline to Yanbu was completed in 1981. In the late 1980s, its throughput capacity was expanded from 1.85 million barrels per day (mbd) to 3.2 mbd. There are plans to raise its capacity even further to 4.8 mbd and to create an underground reserve of 1.5 billion barrels near Yanbu. See Roberto Aliboni, *The Red Sea Region* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1985), 77. Iraq is also developing a 1.65 mbd pipeline to a terminal 30 miles south of Yanbu. See Paul McDonald, "Red Sea: the Middle East's Next Troublespot?" *World Today* (May 1988): 76-77. To accommodate the Red Sea oil flow, Egypt has decided to expand its Sumed pipeline from 1.9 mbd to 2.3 mbd of throughput, as well as to widen the Suez Canal to handle supertankers up to 270,000 dwt.

<sup>12</sup>See Geoffrey Jukes, *The Indian Ocean in Soviet Naval Policy*, Adelphi Paper No. 87 (London: IISS, 1972).

<sup>13</sup>The point was made in James M. McConnell, ed. by Michael McGuire, "The Soviet Navy in the Indian Ocean," *Soviet Naval Developments: Capability and Context* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1973), 389-406.

<sup>14</sup>See, for example, I. Lebedev, "Indiiskii Okean-Zona Mira Ili Konfrontatsii? (The Indian Ocean--Zone of Peace or Confrontation?)," *Mirovaia Ekonomika I Mezhdunarodnye Otnosheniia*, No. 8 (1985): 91. Interestingly, an article on the Indian Ocean published in the professional journal of the Soviet Navy, *Morskoi Sbornik*, does not refer to a USN SSBN threat, but rather to USAF B-52s operating out of Diego Garcia as a strategic threat to the USSR from a southern azimuth. See Captain First Rank M. Ovanesov, "K Voprosu o Voenno-Politicheskoi Obstanovka v Indiiskom Okeane, (On the Question of the Military-Political Situation in the Indian Ocean)," *Morskoi Sbornik*, no. 1, (1985): 25.

<sup>15</sup>For further detail, see the author's "The Soviet Naval Presence in the Indian Ocean and Western Security," in *US Strategic Interests in the Gulf Region*, ed. W.J. Olson (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1987), 83-105.

<sup>16</sup>South Yemen's air defense capabilities include SA-2, SA-3, SA-6, SA-7, and SA-9 missiles, and MiG-21 and Su-20 fighter aircraft. Ethiopia's air defenses feature SA-2 and SA-3 missile batteries and MiG-21 fighters. Ethiopia's naval capabilities are more impressive than those of the PDRY. They include several *Osa II* missile boats, two *Turya* class hydrofoils, and two *Petya* class frigates. See the data contained in *The Military Balance 1989-90* (London: International Institute of Strategic Studies, 1989).

<sup>17</sup>See US Congress, Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Disapprove Construction Projects on the Island of Diego Garcia*, Hearings, 94th Congress, 1st Session, 10 June 1975; and US Department of Defense, *Soviet Military Power*, 4th Edition (Washington, DC: GPO, 1985), 128.

<sup>18</sup>Bear Ds are also capable of providing targeting data for sea launched cruise missiles--a valuable asset in peacetime naval exercises as well as in wartime, should, of course, the Bear Ds survive long enough to be able to transmit the data.

<sup>19</sup>See *Disapprove Construction Projects on the Island of Diego Garcia*, 7.

<sup>20</sup>See Remnek, "Soviet Strategic Military Interests in Africa in the 1980s," 8.

<sup>21</sup>See Ia. Ia. Etinger, *Mezhdugosudarstvennye Otnosheniia v Afrike (Interstate Relations in Africa)* (Moscow: Nauka, 1972), 71-84.

<sup>22</sup>See *Soviet Military Power*, 123. Dahlac services about 70 Soviet naval ships per year. Since April 1983, ships from the Soviet Mediterranean Squadron have also called at Dahlac for repairs and maintenance. See US Department of the Navy, *Understanding Soviet Naval Developments*, 5th Edition (Washington, DC: GPO, 1985), 10.

<sup>23</sup>See *Statement of Rear Admiral Thomas A. Brooks, US Navy Director of Naval Intelligence*, before the Seapower, Strategic,

and Critical Materials Subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee on Intelligence Issues, 22 February 1989, 25. The Soviets appear to have shifted all of their naval reconnaissance flights to Aden since two Il-38 May ASW planes were destroyed by EPLF guerrillas at Asmara airfield in 1984. See *Soviet Military Power*, 123.

<sup>24</sup>See David A. Korn, *Ethiopia, the United States, and the Soviet Union* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986), 75. The amount of military assistance was later increased. As of 1987, the US had delivered \$80 million dollars worth of arms to Somalia, with most of the deliveries made during the mid-1980s. See *US ACDA World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers 1978-82* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1984), 95; and *US ACDA World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers 1988* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1989), 111.

<sup>25</sup>See Defense Secretary Caspar W. Weinberger *Annual Report to the Congress on the FY 1986 Budget* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1985), 233-34.

<sup>26</sup>In fact, the US government has spent slightly less on military construction of facilities in Somalia than on those in Kenya (such as dredging Mombasa's harbor and upgrading its airfield with improved navigation aids and maintenance facilities). By 1985, the costs of military construction in Kenya amounted to \$57.9 million. See Defense Secretary Weinberger's *Annual Report to the Congress on the FY 1986 Budget*, 233. The Kenyan facilities were developed almost exclusively for peacetime use, primarily for crew rest and liberty and secondarily for logistic support and maintenance. Until the rampant spread of AIDS in the late 1980s, Mombasa was one of the very few attractive liberty ports available to US military forces in the Western Indian Ocean basin.

<sup>27</sup>See Patrick E. Tyler, "US Finds Persian Gulf Threat Ebbs," *Washington Post*, 7 February 1990, A1.

<sup>28</sup>For an excellent description of this mining incident, see Scott C. Truver, "Mines of August: An International Whodunit," *US Naval Institute Proceedings* (May 1985): 95-117.

<sup>29</sup>*International Legal Materials*, Vol. 14 (1975), 1468, cited in Ruth Lapidot-Eschelbacher, 147.

<sup>30</sup>*International Legal Materials*, 147.

<sup>31</sup>See Noah Lucas, "Israeli Policy in the Red Sea," in *The Red Sea: Prospects for Stability*, ed. Abdel Majid Farid (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984), 151.

<sup>32</sup>See Mordechai Abir *Oil, Power and Politics* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 1974), 138ff. The only shots fired were by an Egyptian destroyer against the US merchant vessel *Lasalle*.

<sup>33</sup>See Edgar O'Ballance, *No Victor, No Vanquished: The Yom Kippur War* (San Rafael, CA: The Presidio Press, 1978), 326.

<sup>34</sup>The 1984 mining of the Red Sea was not directed specifically against Israel. Although circumstantial evidence points to the Libyan cargo vessel *Ghat* as the perpetrator, Libya never claimed responsibility for the operation, whose objectives remain obscure. However, if the Libyans were responsible, this action would seem to be consistent with Qadhdhafi's goal of establishing Arab control from the Atlantic to the Gulf.

<sup>35</sup>See Lapidoth-Eschelbacher, 148-49.

<sup>36</sup>See United Nations Communication NV/78/63, 12 July 1978; quoted in Lapidoth-Eschelbacher, 149.

<sup>37</sup>See Centre des Hautes Etudes sur L'Afrique et L'Asie Modernes, *France: Ocean Indien, Mer Rouge* (Paris: FEDN, 1986), 324.

<sup>38</sup>See David A. Deese and Louis B. Miller, "Western Europe," in *Energy and Security*, ed. David A. Deese and Joseph S. Nye (Cambridge, MA: Ballinger Publishing Co., 1981), 187.

<sup>39</sup>Calculated from data in *International Energy Agency Quarterly Oil Statistics and Energy Balances, First Quarter 1989* (Paris: OECD, 1989), 226.

<sup>40</sup>Computed from data in *British Petroleum Statistic Review of World Energy* (London: BP, June 1987).

<sup>41</sup>See Abir, 23.

<sup>42</sup>Cordesman, 96.

<sup>43</sup>Over half of Djibouti's population are Issas, a Somali tribe. This ethnic kinship formed the basis of Somalia's irredentist claims to the former French Territory of the Afars and Issas. Since Djibouti's independence, Somalia has renounced this territorial claim. As the terminus of the Franco-Ethiopian railway, Djibouti protects Ethiopia's only rail line to the sea, the safety of which is regarded as essential to Ethiopia's security.

<sup>44</sup>See CHEAM *France: Ocean Indien, Mer Rouge*, 322.

<sup>45</sup>For further detail, see John Waterbury, *Hydropolitics of the Nile Valley* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1979), 74-75. In 1957, Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie rejected these protocols in notes to the Egyptian and Sudanese governments, and affirmed Ethiopia's natural rights to Nile waters originating on its territory. Waterbury, 78.

<sup>46</sup>Waterbury, 78.

<sup>47</sup>Waterbury, 238.

<sup>48</sup>The Ethiopian delegate to a UN Water Conference held at Mar del Plata in 1977 emphasized the sovereign right of any riparian state in the absence of an international agreement to proceed unilaterally with the development of water resources within its territory, but urged that such international agreements to establish co-riparian benefits and responsibilities should be pursued as a matter of general principle. Cited in Waterbury, 238.

<sup>49</sup>See Truver, "Mines of August," 95-117.

<sup>50</sup>*The New York Times*, 17 January 1990, A3.

**Table 1: Strategic Importance of the Bab al-Mandab  
and  
Horn of Africa to External States**

<u>Country</u>	<u>Strategic Interest</u>	<u>Current Value</u>	<u>Change</u>	<u>Current Threat</u>	<u>Change</u>
<b>USSR</b>	Freedom of Navigation	High	None	Low	Decrease
	Naval Support Facilities--Peacetime	High	Decrease	Moderate	Increase
	Naval Support Facilities--Wartime	Low	Decrease	High	Increase
<b>United States</b>	Freedom of Navigation	Moderate	No Change	Low	Decrease
	Military Support Facilities--Peacetime	Low	No Change	Moderate	Increase
	Military Support Facilities--Wartime	Low	Decrease	Moderate	Increase
<b>Israel</b>	Freedom of Navigation	High	Decrease	Low	Decrease
<b>France</b>	Freedom of Navigation	High	Decrease	Low	Decrease
<b>Egypt</b>	Freedom of Navigation	High	No Change	Low	No Change
	Flow of Nile Tributaries	High	No Change	Moderate	Increase
<b>Saudi Arabia</b>	Freedom of Navigation	Moderate	Decrease	Low	Decrease
	Marxist-Free Region	High	Decrease	Low	Decrease

# Ethiopia on the Verge of Disaster

**David A. Korn**

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Washington, DC

The word circulating among Washington's Ethiopia watchers is that we are witnessing the final days of the rule of Mengistu Haile Mariam. After the spectacular defeats suffered by Mengistu's armies in Eritrea, Tigray, and Wollo these past two years, and after a coup attempt in May 1989 that nearly succeeded, his fall seems only a matter of time. It will take a miracle to save him. Neither his now distinctly cool Soviet patrons nor anyone else seems to be volunteering to bring one forth.

That, it might be said, is the good news. After all, it would be hard not to feel satisfaction at the prospect of the removal of the man who threw the US out and for years was the bane of American policy in the Horn of Africa, callously sacrificed so many of his countrymen's lives for the sake of his own ambition, and imposed brutal Marxist-Leninist rule on them. The bad news, almost obscured by our fascination with the drama unfolding before our eyes, is that Mengistu is bringing the house down with him. It hardly seems exaggerated to say that Ethiopia, sub-Saharan Africa's second most populous nation and one of its largest, is on the verge of disaster. It has already become chronically dependent on massive Western food handouts, and even with these is unable to avert recurrent famine. The oldest of the African states, Ethiopia could become the first to split up if the Eritrean People's Liberation Front were to succeed in driving out the Ethiopian army. The struggle over who or what will take Mengistu's place in Addis Ababa could plunge Ethiopia into frightful chaos and bloodshed.

Since 1977 when Mengistu took over, Ethiopia's history and its relations with its neighbors and with the major powers have been shaped almost entirely

by his successes and failures. His greatest and perhaps only true success lay in repelling the Somali invasion of the summer of 1977. This he accomplished largely thanks to massive deliveries of Soviet arms and the timely arrival of a Cuban expeditionary force of some 20,000. This made him a national hero and gave him a political capital that lasted for almost a decade until depleted by his failures. The latter have been, in the main, civil war and famine, both aggravated by Mengistu's attempt to impose a totalitarian Marxist-Leninist structure on the state and on its citizenry.

## Civil War

The paradox here is that the areas which have taken up arms against the central government are the core regions of the ancient Ethiopian state: the Christian highlands of Eritrea and Tigray and large parts of Gondar and Wollo. Southern and Western Ethiopia, whose incorporations into the state date only from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and whose population is predominantly Muslim, have by and large remained loyal.

The reasons for this are complex and vary from place to place, but one often cited is the land nationalization decree of 1975. This act put all land under state ownership, but only in theory; it in fact put use of the land in the hands of the peasant, and it freed the peasant from debt and servitude. This was a great boon in the southern and western regions of Ethiopia where peasants who owned their land were the minority. But in Tigray, Gondar, Gojjam, and Wollo, between 83 and 93 percent of the peasantry owned their land already before the revolution;<sup>1</sup> they had little if anything to gain, and, in some cases, stood to lose. The land nationalization decree created a powerful constituency for the revolution in the latifundia of the south and west, but won little friendship for it in the core areas where small ownership predominated.



Another reason is the Oromo-inhabited southern and western regions had little tradition of political organization, unlike Tigray, Gondar, and Wollo, from which Ethiopia has been ruled at one time or another. Although they are Ethiopia's largest single ethnic-linguistic group, the Oromos have not shown much unity of purpose. Despite the hoopla it occasionally enjoys, the Oromo Liberation Front has demonstrated only marginal ability to mobilize Ethiopia's Oromos into effective opposition to the government in Addis Ababa. Oromos have in fact provided the bulk of the soldiery that has fought Mengistu's wars in Eritrea and Tigray these past fifteen years. They have had no trouble integrating into the dominant Amhara culture and many have taken Amhara names. They are well represented in Mengistu's regime, as they were in Haile Selassie's.<sup>2</sup>

### **The Eritrean War**

Mengistu inherited the Eritrean war from Haile Selassie, but he bears responsibility for having transformed it from a relatively minor affair into the calamity that it later became. In 1962, the emperor abolished Eritrea's federal status, closed down its parliament and the other institutions of self-government established by the British, and put it under direct rule. Even before this, a heavy-handed, arrogant, imperial administration had alienated a substantial segment of the population. By the mid 1960s, there was armed rebellion in Eritrea's outlying districts. After the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, radical Arab states began to channel arms and money to the insurgents, for, at first, the Eritrean independence movement seemed mainly Arab and Muslim, and supporting it offered a means of retaliation against Haile Selassie for his close ties with the US and Israel.<sup>3</sup> The Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), at the outset an organization that proclaimed itself Marxist-Leninist, got help from Cuba and, until 1971, when the PRC and Ethiopia established diplomatic relations, from China. At the time, the Soviets never acknowledged aiding the EPLF, but recent testimony suggests they did so clandestinely.

Despite this foreign support, as late as 1974, the rebellion in Eritrea was handily contained by an Ethiopian force of some 25,000, a little over half the strength of the Ethiopian army at the time. The

revolution was the turning point. Historical opinion is divided over whether the program for Eritrean autonomy put forward in October 1974 by General Aman Andom, an officer of Eritrean origin and the first provisional head of state after Haile Selassie was deposed, had much real chance of success. But Aman was given no opportunity to try. Mengistu and other leading members of the Derg, the committee of middle grade Ethiopian officers who had seized power, rejected his proposals, had him killed, and early in 1975 launched the Ethiopian army on a campaign intended to crush Eritrean resistance. With this, the revolutionary regime crossed its figurative rubicon, going for a strictly military solution to a problem that might still at that stage have been amenable to treatment by political means.

In the final months of 1977 and early 1978, Mengistu's government came very close to losing Eritrea. Amid the chaos of the revolution and the Somali invasion, Eritrean forces seized the entire province except for its capital city Asmara and the port of Massawa. Two things saved the Ethiopians: rivalry among Eritrean factions (at the moment of victory, the various Eritrean resistance groups turned to fighting one another), and Soviet and Cuban intervention to stave off the Somali invasion, which permitted Mengistu to redirect his forces northward once the Somali threat had been dealt with. By 1979, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front had driven its rivals from the field but had been itself pushed back to its northern stronghold of Nakfa. In 1980, 1981, and 1982, amid much fanfare, Mengistu led offensives aimed at overrunning Nakfa and finishing off the EPLF. All failed, as did subsequent ones conducted with less publicity.

But as late as 1984, the tenth anniversary of the revolution, the war in Eritrea seemed essentially stalled. The EPLF had recouped some of its earlier losses and had begun to make a comeback. However, Ethiopian ground forces in Eritrea numbered some 170,000 (a little over half the entire Ethiopian army, the same ratio as in 1974, but with the figures multiplied by almost seven) and were supported by a powerful air arm. It seemed almost inconceivable that the EPLF, even with the 40,000 to 60,000 men it had mustered, stood any real chance of overcoming this Ethiopian force. It might still have been possible to put a political solution in train, had Mengistu been willing to offer the Eritreans some-

thing more than simple integration into a unitary Ethiopian state. The thought never seems seriously to have crossed his mind.

By the mid 1980s, the EPLF began to pass from guerrilla tactics to those of conventional warfare, putting into action against the Ethiopian army Soviet made tanks, artillery, and other heavy weapons seized in battle from the Ethiopians. The EPLF scored a number of successes in 1983 and 1984, but its defeat of a sizeable Ethiopian force at Barentu in July 1985 was probably the military turning point in the war in Eritrea.<sup>4</sup> From there on out, the Ethiopians were put on the defensive. In March 1988, the EPLF routed an Ethiopian army of some 20,000 men near the town of Afabet, 100 miles north of Asmara. The defeat at Afabet appears to have brought to an end whatever hopes Mengistu may have had of regaining military superiority in Eritrea.

### **The Tigrean War**

It is the Tigrean insurgency, long regarded as a junior partner to that in Eritrea and much less threatening to the regime in Addis Ababa, that has pushed Mengistu to the wall. In February 1989, after years of fighting a purely hit and run guerrilla war, the forces of the Tigray People's Liberation Front, aided by an EPLF force, destroyed an Ethiopian army of over 20,000 at the town of Ende Selassie in western Tigray. This defeat forced the evacuation of the entire province of Tigray.

Strategically, the loss of Tigray was an extremely serious one, for it meant the cutting of the last land link to Eritrea. The blow was perhaps even more telling psychologically: it was the first time since Mussolini's army invaded in 1935 that an Ethiopian government had to give up an entire province. The defeat at Ende Selassie, coming after that in Eritrea less than a year earlier, shook the Ethiopian military establishment to its core. It was almost certainly the event that triggered the May 1989 coup attempt, the first ever since Mengistu seized power in 1977. The purge of the senior ranks of the Ethiopian army that followed caused a further deterioration in its fighting capabilities.<sup>5</sup> Events then cascaded: in August and September, the TPLF pressed southward along the road into Wollo province, taking the major road towns, routing sizeable Ethiopian forces along the way, capturing large amounts of equipment, and momentarily even forcing the evacuation of the

provincial capital of Dessie. As this is written, TPLF forces have advanced into northern Shoa province, less than 100 miles from Addis Ababa; in Gondar they have reportedly routed the large Ethiopian army garrison at Debra Tabor, and cut the road between Gondar city and lake Tana.

Unlike its Eritrean counterpart, the Tigrean insurgency was exclusively the child of the revolution, and in more ways than one. Tigray was the original seat of the Ethiopian state, and many of Ethiopia's emperors came from the Tigrean nobility. At times a rebellious province when one of its own was not emperor (an uprising took place there in 1943), Tigray was nonetheless quiet and loyal during the final years of Haile Selassie's reign. It did not slide into armed rebellion until some months after the monarchy had been overturned. The young men who took to the hills in 1975 and set up the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) were radical left communists who considered the Derg a band of fascists. They acted out of a combination of extreme leftist ideology and a profound sense of regional grievance: Tigray, they claimed, was not being given its due by the new rulers in Addis Ababa. Many of them were high school or university students in the capital at the time of the revolution. Later, they were joined by Tigrean students who were members of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party, an extreme Marxist-Leninist group that tried to unseat Mengistu in 1977 through a campaign of urban terror and was ruthlessly suppressed by him.

Clearly, the TPLF does not represent counter revolution. Neither does it seek independence for Tigray. It aspires to what long seemed an even more ambitious goal: to throw out Mengistu's regime and take its place. Although self-proclaimed Marxist-Leninist, it is not known to have been supported by or to have sought support from any communist regime, and it denounces Mengistu for having "sold our country to the Soviets and allowed the Soviets to do what they wanted."<sup>6</sup> One of the main planks of its platform is to "close down existing and prevent the establishment of new imperialist military bases in the country."<sup>7</sup> The TPLF's shrill denunciations of Soviet intervention in Ethiopia should not, however, be taken to mean that it considers itself a friend of the West. The eradication of "Western imperialism spearheaded by America" along with

"Eastern imperialism spearheaded by the Soviet Union" is proclaimed as one of its principal goals.<sup>8</sup>

What accounts for the dramatic Eritrean and Tigrean military successes? Unquestionably, able leadership and high morale on the EPLF and TPLF side have played a major role, but the mistakes of the regime in Addis Ababa and the manifest demoralization of the Ethiopian army have been equally if not more important.

### **The Military Mistakes**

Mengistu's biggest mistake lay in trying to deal by purely military means with the Eritrean insurgency, a problem whose origins were political, and might, in earlier stages at least, have been susceptible to political solution.

Eritrean spokesmen maintain that Eritrea's sense of national identity arose out of the shared experience of Italian colonial rule. Sixty years of separate existence under Italian colonialism, and another ten under the British, unquestionably did give the Eritreans a sense of being different, even superior, to Ethiopians. But to argue that the Italian colonial experience fused the nine distinct ethnic/linguistic groups that make up the population of Eritrea into one national consciousness is plainly an exaggeration. Whether Eritreans willingly accepted federation with Ethiopia in Haile Selassie's time has been and will undoubtedly continue to be endlessly debated by Ethiopian and Eritrean spokesmen; both make telling but inconclusive points. It is however a fact that armed insurrection against Addis Ababa's rule did not arise on any significant scale until well after the federal status was abolished, and, as we have seen, it did not take on truly major proportions until the revolutionary government rejected proposals for a political solution and chose to seek a military one. The feeling of nationhood that today unquestionably does exist among many Eritreans was forged through two decades of warfare, in reaction to atrocities committed upon Eritrean civilians by Ethiopian troops mostly from the central and southern areas of the country and to the central government's always heavy-handed and frequently brutal rule.

Mengistu's decision to seek a military solution in Eritrea, and by extension in Tigray, had the immediate consequence of forcing upon Ethiopia, one of the world's five or six poorest countries, the burden

of a military machine among the world's largest.<sup>10</sup> Under the revolutionary regime, the four division army of imperial days was expanded to 24: a total of 300,000 men, with an air force and navy of 5,000 and para-military forces estimated at another 169,000.<sup>11</sup>

To raise forces of this size, it was necessary to find a foreign benefactor prepared to equip them, and continue equipping them through thick and thin. The danger here, of course, is that the benefactor might one day tire of his role, leaving the beneficiary empty handed and in dire trouble. That is the prospect, or at least the possibility, that Mengistu now faces.

For many years, the Soviet Union willingly took upon itself the role of supplier to Mengistu's enormous military machine, considering the political benefits to be derived from having Ethiopia in its camp and Ethiopia's society transformed along Marxist-Leninist lines to be well worth the cost. Soviet arms deliveries to Ethiopia are estimated to have totalled almost ten billion dollars between 1977 and 1987.<sup>12</sup> The Soviet alliance with Ethiopia, however, was a product of the Brezhnev era. Mengistu was Brezhnev's great friend; he went to Moscow at least twice a year to see the Soviet leader, until Brezhnev became too ill to receive him. This relationship was not transferred to Gorbachev. Right from the start, Mengistu was no favorite of Gorbachev's; he was in fact not even able to get a private meeting with Gorbachev when he went to Moscow in February 1985 for Chernenko's funeral.

At the time, Kremlin watchers didn't know quite what to make of this. Now it seems a portent of what was to come. Over the past year, the Soviets have been signalling loudly and clearly their dissatisfaction with the Ethiopian government's policies. Early in 1989, a leading Soviet journal issued an acerbic across-the-board critique of the policies and performance of Mengistu's regime.<sup>13</sup> In March 1989, a Soviet Embassy official in Addis Ababa, speaking with astonishing candor, told the *New York Times* that Ethiopians were turning against the regime.<sup>14</sup> In June, Moscow publicly urged its Ethiopian ally to seek a cease-fire and open "a dialogue between the government and opposition organizations."<sup>15</sup> Soviet leaders reportedly told Mengistu the USSR will honor its military assis-

tance agreement through the end of its term in 1991, but that beyond that time nothing is guaranteed.

None of this, however, means the Soviets have disengaged from Ethiopia. Soviet arms shipments continue and may even have increased following the TPLF victories in August and September 1989.<sup>16</sup> There appear to be sharp differences between Soviet foreign policy and military establishments about the utility of the Ethiopian tie, with the military being plainly much more reluctant to give it up. Still, the message from Moscow has been clear enough to prompt Mengistu to look around for other sources of military supply, but his options have been fading fast. The collapse of hard-line Marxist-Leninist regimes in eastern Europe, in particular the disappearance of the Honecker government in East Germany which provided Ethiopia substantial assistance in internal security and propaganda, has been a sore blow to Mengistu and has left him with few friends in the communist world or elsewhere. He can still probably expect some support from North Korea but little more than sympathy from Cuba. His renewal of diplomatic relations with Israel in November of last year was obviously a step taken in desperation, but the hopes he evidently places on it seem likely to be disappointed. The Israelis can provide some training and occasional bits of equipment,<sup>17</sup> but they do not have the resources even to begin to plug the hole that would be left by a Soviet pullout. No other country or group of countries seems likely to be able or willing to do so either.

With Soviet arms came Soviet conventional war-fighting doctrine. The disastrous consequences of this for the Ethiopian army in its struggle with guerrilla forces in Eritrea and Tigray have become clear only in the last two years or so. One of the main reasons for the Ethiopian regime's turn to Israel appears to have been the hope that the Israelis could show its army how to fight a guerrilla war.

The benefactor's unreliability and ill-suited military doctrine have not been the only drawbacks. Undertaking to build a large army and pursue an endless war had the further untoward consequence that, sooner or later, the Ethiopian government would have to resort to conscription. In a surge of patriotic feeling, Ethiopians volunteered in mass in 1977 and 1978 to push back the Somali invasion. For several years thereafter, the Ethiopian army was

able to maintain its strength through more or less voluntary enlistments. The high casualty rates incurred in the repeatedly unsuccessful Eritrean campaigns (that of early 1982 is believed to have left 40,000 Ethiopian soldiers dead or wounded<sup>18</sup>) caused the stream of enlistments to run dry. In 1983, a National Military Service law was issued requiring two and one-half years of military duty for all male Ethiopians between the ages of eighteen and thirty.<sup>19</sup> This measure proved extraordinarily unpopular. In Addis Ababa, parents immediately took to hiding their children, and the authorities, desperate to fill conscription quotas, began rounding young men up off the city streets and breaking into homes in the middle of the night to carry off anyone they could find. As a result, the age of Ethiopian army recruits has fallen dramatically (the EPLF has displayed to the foreign press Ethiopian prisoners of war in their early teens<sup>20</sup>) and so has their motivation. Large scale forced conscription of teenagers unquestionably has much to do with reports that Ethiopian units have frequently broken and fled on first contact with the enemy over the past two years.

Politicization and repeated purges of its senior ranks also explain much about the Ethiopian army's poor performance. During the crisis of 1977, professional officers who had been expelled from the military, even some who had been imprisoned, were put back on duty and made noteworthy contributions toward repelling the Somali invasion. In subsequent years, however, political commissars were introduced into all units at least down to the battalion level and political loyalty became an important criterion for advancement. Mengistu repeatedly executed senior officers whose units suffered reverses in battle or who had the courage to tell him that the war in Eritrea could not be won by military means. Over the years, there have been repeated reports of arrests and executions of large numbers of middle grade officers suspected of dissent or coup plotting.

The massive purge carried out following the failed coup attempt last May hurt Ethiopia's air force particularly badly. Many air force officers were implicated in the coup, and for some time afterwards, Mengistu kept his air arm almost entirely grounded. The air in 1990 was the only sector in which the Ethiopian military retained superiority over its opponents, for neither the Eritreans nor the

Tigreans have aircraft at their disposal. EPLF spokesmen claim that Ethiopian air power is the only thing that prevents them from pushing the Ethiopian army out of Eritrea.<sup>21</sup>

### Famine

While missteps on the military side account for the recent defeats suffered by Mengistu's armed forces, it was famine that first discredited his regime and set it on its downward course. Ethiopia lives off the land. It has no significant mineral resources and only a very small industrial base. Almost 90 percent of the population is classified as rural, and agriculture accounts for approximately 80 percent of gross domestic product.<sup>22</sup> Yet according to the best available statistics, from 1979 to 1987 Ethiopia's total annual food production fell by over two million tons, from approximately 7.5 million to 5.3 million, while population rose by several million.<sup>23</sup> Meanwhile, Ethiopia's population has been growing at an annual average of 2.9 percent, and the World Bank projects a population of 49 million in 1990 and 65 million by the year 2000. This combination of falling food production and rapidly rising population has created a structural food production deficit that has soared alarmingly, from 325,000 tons annually in the early 1980s to an estimated two million tons in 1990.<sup>24</sup> Even if the decline in agricultural output can be arrested and growth restored to a three percent annual level, an unlikely prospect under current conditions, the structural deficit will rise to 2.3 million tons by 1995 and to 2.5 million tons by the year 2000, according to one estimate.<sup>25</sup>

Since 1983, this drop in food production has brought recurrent famine to large parts of Ethiopia and a dramatic fall in living standards in urban as well as rural areas. An International Labor Organization study found the proportion of Addis Ababa's population unable to meet its minimum needs rose from 51.2 percent in 1976 to over 67 percent in 1982,<sup>26</sup> and since that time the figure has unquestionably gone much higher. Although the regime made strenuous efforts to keep the capital supplied during the great famine of 1984-85, a study of one administrative district in central Addis Ababa showed the number of starving children below the age of five rose from under ten percent in late 1983 to 16 to 20 percent between April and December 1984.<sup>27</sup>

Drought has been an element in this stark picture; it has hit Ethiopia repeatedly over the past two decades. The main culprit, by the consensus of Western experts, is the policies pursued by the Ethiopian government. The land nationalization decree of 1975 prohibits anyone from farming more than ten hectares and from hiring outside labor. While small farmers working individual plots have continued to represent 90 percent of the agricultural work force and produce 90 percent of the output, the regime has until recently refused to offer the peasant farmer any type of assistance. Collectivization was its goal, and it sought to make collectivization attractive by providing machinery, fertilizer, and seed to collective farms and by paying higher prices for their crops. Despite these incentives, collective farming has had relatively few takers and has consistently produced no more per hectare and sometimes less than peasants farming individual plots with primitive instruments and no fertilizer or other modern inputs. The regime's rationale for promoting collectivization was entirely political: if Ethiopia was to have a Marxist-Leninist system, which Mengistu and his associates had decided it should, agriculture, the main element of its economy, could not remain, so to speak, in private hands.

The main reason for the fall in agricultural output has been the requirement levied upon the peasant to sell a substantial portion of his harvest to the government at confiscatory prices. The system of obligatory quotas is one that governments throughout Africa have used to supply their needs and those of the urban areas at low cost. Results have been disastrous: surplus production disappears as farmers, lacking incentive, cut back to what is needed to feed their families. The Ethiopian government's prohibition on moving farm products across administrative boundaries (making it illegal for the farmer to sell any produce on the free market outside his own immediate area) has further aggravated the situation.<sup>28</sup> In December 1987, under heavy pressure from the World Bank and Western European aid donors, the Ethiopian government agreed to a series of measures designed to introduce some free market incentives, but US experts consider the changes too modest to make a significant impact.

In retrospect, it is clear that the great famine of 1984-85, in which a million people may have died, was the point at which Mengistu's fortunes began to unravel. More than anything that had happened up to that time, it undermined his claim to legitimacy. The revolution that brought Mengistu to power swept in on the heels of what was by comparison a relatively minor drought and famine in Wollo province in 1972 and 1973. The revolutionaries of the early 1970s pointed to it as proof of the failure of the imperial regime. The famine of 1984-85 was all the more embarrassing in that it came just at the moment when Mengistu was celebrating, with much ceremony and at much expense, the tenth anniversary of the revolution and bringing into official being his Marxist-Leninist party, the Workers Party of Ethiopia. The famine compelled him to launch two new programs that simply compounded his problems: resettlement and villagization.

Resettlement, put in motion toward the end of 1984, was touted to foreign aid donors as the solution to Ethiopia's problem of drought: transfer the population of the drought-stricken highland areas to the well-watered lowlands of the southwest. By convenient coincidence, the drought-stricken highland areas were also for the most part the areas of insurgency. Removing population from them stood to drain the insurgency of its pool of manpower and its base of support. Transferring peasants in mass to new settlements offered a quick and easy means of promoting collectivization. The resettlement program was carried out in such haste and under such atrocious conditions that tens of thousands died. Many of the resettlement farms have required massive infusions of Ethiopian government and foreign aid donor support simply to stay in existence.

Villagization, "the concentration of scattered homesteads into centralized villages,"<sup>29</sup> was touted to Western and international organization aid donors as a means of offering modern amenities to the rural population such as clean water, electricity, schools, and health care. This was clearly a preposterous claim and, to their credit, most donors have recognized it as such. The regime did not have the means to provide the promised benefits, and relocation has simply added to the peasant's difficulties, obliging him to travel a longer distance to work his land and making it harder for him to protect his crops from animals and pests. The purpose of villagization is

wholly political: to bring the peasantry more readily under the regime's control, and to prepare the way for the large scale collectivization of agriculture called for in the current Ethiopian government ten year economic plan. Villagization has been carried out on a vast scale. According to figures made public in September 1987, over eight million people, some 22 percent of the rural population, had, under government compulsion, torn down their homes, transported the materials to newly chosen centers, and there rebuilt them.<sup>30</sup> The figure is said to have reached 40 percent by 1989.<sup>31</sup> The villagization program appears to have met with little violent resistance but also with no enthusiasm. What evidence exists indicates that it is distinctly unpopular.<sup>32</sup> Disaffection among the peasantry, whose sons make up the bulk of Ethiopian soldiery, may well account for much of the poor showing of the Ethiopian army these past two years.

### **Ethiopia--Dilemma for the West**

Mengistu's fall could bring changes of enormous consequence to Ethiopia and to the Horn of Africa. It could also face US and other Western policy makers with serious dilemmas.

One is what to do about Eritrea should it become independent. In September 1989, the Ethiopian government and the EPLF began talks under the auspices of former President Jimmy Carter. The first round of talks, held in Atlanta, bogged down over procedural matters. Most of the procedural issues were resolved during the second round, in Nairobi in November. But a date has yet to be set for another meeting, and the two sides have not even begun to deal with the problem of setting an agenda for substantive talks. The likelihood of a negotiated settlement seems small. The EPLF has been fighting for over two decades, has set up its own government in the large area of Eritrea that it holds, and has developed an effective military apparatus. It has deliberately left itself some leeway on the matter of independence by saying that the Eritrean people should be called on to decide their future, without specifying what that future should be. But it is not going to give up what it has been struggling for all these years, independence or autonomy tantamount to independence, and return Eritrea to the tutelage of an Ethiopian government, particularly one headed by Mengistu. And it is hard to imagine that

if Mengistu's army were to collapse, the EPLF would not try to set up an independent state and seek recognition.

Eritrea's location along the Red Sea coast, bordering on Sudan and across from Saudi Arabia and Yemen, gives it definite strategic interest. But unless the separation from Ethiopia is accomplished peaceably, establishing relations with Eritrea while retaining them with Ethiopia could require more than a little diplomatic skill. The EPLF is trying hard to look attractive. It no longer defines itself as Marxist-Leninist or even as leftist. Now it speaks to the world in the language of conventional nationalism and moderation, and it openly seeks to cultivate sympathy and support from the Western public. If Eritrea becomes independent it will unquestionably seek Western aid. And to survive, an independent Eritrea will unquestionably need a lot of foreign aid. What kind of relations the United States should entertain with an independent Eritrea is an issue that deserves study now, before Washington finds itself faced with a fait accompli.

A second problem that will confront Western governments is how to deal with the TPLF. Although it does not itself seek independence from Ethiopia and opposes the break-away of other regions, the TPLF has declared that it will respect "the right of the Eritrean people to self-determination."<sup>33</sup> How long this commitment made in the comradeship of EPLF and TPLF arms will survive the destruction of Mengistu's regime, the common enemy, is of course open to question. As for the organization of post-Mengistu Ethiopia, the TPLF has announced that it favors the establishment of "a transitional government comprising all political parties, including the Workers Party of Ethiopia..." and that "after a democratic discussion, the Ethiopian people should draft a constitution and form a freely elected government."<sup>34</sup> Whether it truly expects anything quite so utopian to be possible is, again, open to question. But the TPLF has sought to broaden its base of appeal in Ethiopia by linking up with an Amhara group, the Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement.

For all its military success, the TPLF has neither experience in running a modern state nor in dealing with the outside world. Its anti-Western rhetoric is less worrisome than the fact that its published program for running post-Mengistu Ethiopia suggests

that it intends to make many of the same mistakes that Mengistu and his associates made. One of its policy documents, for example, declares "so as to create the conditions for economic ownership independent of imperialism, the main economic institutions will be brought under the control of the people's government."<sup>35</sup>

Like the EPLF, the TPLF has fought long and hard, and, particularly after its recent successes, it cannot be ignored. It is going to be one of the arbiters, perhaps the arbiter, of Ethiopia's future. Along with its firebrand sloganeers, it appears also to have some moderate elements. It has recently begun to reach out to Western opinion, and some of its spokesmen, at least, are trying to portray it as pragmatic on matters of economic policy.<sup>36</sup> If the US is to play a role in post-Mengistu Ethiopia, it would do well to get to know more about the TPLF, leave a door open to it and try to encourage its moderate elements.

Finally, there is the problem of how to feed the people that live within the borders of what is today recognized as Ethiopia. Again in 1990 famine threatens Eritrea, Tigray, and other parts of Ethiopia. The West will have to supply vast amounts of food to Ethiopia in the years ahead if massive famine is to be averted. As the price for its agreement to shoulder that burden, it should insist that the government or governments that succeed the current one in Addis Ababa make a commitment to proven, workable agricultural policies. These must include a reversion to private land ownership and an end to the costly and failed experiment in state farms and collectivization.

Willingness of those who come next in power to set aside ideology in this single most important area will be a test of whether any lesson has been learned from the dismal experience of the past 15 years. It will also say a lot about what kind of future is in store for the people of Ethiopia.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Christopher Clapham, *Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 47.

<sup>2</sup> Clapham, 214-219.

<sup>3</sup> Later, after Ethiopia moved to the Soviet camp, Saudi Arabia and a few other conservative Arab states began helping the Eritreans. By then the insurgency was in the hands of the predominantly Christian Ethiopian People's Liberation Front.

Saudi backing was less an expression of support for the idea of Eritrean independence than a tactic intended to make life difficult for the Marxist-Leninist regime in Addis Ababa.

<sup>4</sup>Barentu is an important road junction town in southwestern Eritrea. Mengistu executed the general who lost this engagement.

<sup>5</sup>General Kumlachew Dejene, the only one of the coup leaders to have escaped to the West, claims that 680 Ethiopian military officers were arrested, executed or removed following the attempt. See *Washington Post*, 8 October 1989.

<sup>6</sup>"Organizational Statement" (text), Tigray People's Liberation Front, Voice of the Tigray Revolution in Amharic to Ethiopia, 0400 GMT (21 October 1989). Translation by the Foreign Broadcast Information Service, 24 October 1989. (FBIS-AFR-89-204.)

<sup>7</sup>Programme of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front, Foreign Policy, published in *People's Voice* (TPLF magazine) 11, No. 1 (1989). The EPRDF was set up by the TPLF together with a much smaller predominantly Amhara group, the Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement, as a means of broadening the TPLF's appeal in areas outside Tigray proper. "The TPLF in Amhara clothing" is the way one writer has characterized the EPDM (Harold G. Marcus, "Insurgencies in the Ethiopia Region." Paper presented at the Round Table Discussion on Ethiopia, Orkand Corp., 9 November 1989).

<sup>8</sup>Programme of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front.

<sup>9</sup>The EPLF itself lists the following national groups: Afar, Bilen, Hadareb, Kunama, Nara, Rashaida, Saho, Tigre, Tigrinya. Eritrea's population is estimated at 3.5 million and is approximately half Christian and half Moslem.

<sup>10</sup>A report by Soviet GOSPLAN advisors to the Ethiopian Central Planning Commission in 1985 put the share of expenses for defense and state security at 59.1 percent of recurrent public expenditure in 1983-84. See Paul B. Henze, "Ethiopia's Economic Prospects for the 1990s," paper submitted to the Tenth International Ethiopian Studies Conference, Paris, 22-26 August 1988, 9.

<sup>11</sup>Clapham, 109; and David Korn, *Ethiopia, the United States, and the Soviet Union* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986), 91.

<sup>12</sup>US Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, *World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers 1987*, Washington, DC, May 1988, 100 and 127, cited in Henze, "Ethiopia's Economic Prospects for the 1990s."

<sup>13</sup>Narody Azii i Afriki, "The National-Democratic Revolution in the Light of the New Political Thinking (Using Ethiopia as an Example)". See Paul B. Henze, "Glasnost About Building

Socialism in Ethiopia," in Radio Liberty, *Report on the USSR* 1, No. 41, 13 October 1989.

<sup>14</sup>*New York Times*, March 21, 1989.

<sup>15</sup>Soviet government statement on Ethiopia, *Pravda*, June 14, 1989, text reproduced in full in Paul B. Henze, "Eritrean Options and Ethiopia's Future," paper presented at the US Institute of Peace Symposium, July 1989.

<sup>16</sup>Richard B. Remnek, "New Soviet Thinking and Soviet Policy Toward Ethiopia," paper presented to the Roundtable Discussion on Ethiopia, Orkand Corp., 9 November 1989.

<sup>17</sup>Haile Selassie's government broke formal diplomatic relations with Israel in 1973, following the Yom Kippur war, but a substantial de facto relationship persisted until 1978 when it was severed by Mengistu. Even after that, however, Israel continued to provide military communications equipment and certain other minor items to the Ethiopian army, on a sales basis. The program was frequently interrupted owing to the Ethiopian government's reluctance, or inability, to pay.

<sup>18</sup>Clapham, 112.

<sup>19</sup>Clapham, 109.

<sup>20</sup>See notably T.R. Lansner, "In Ethiopia, a P.O.W. at 15," *New York Times*, 15 October 1989.

<sup>21</sup>Interview with Eritrean People's Liberation Front representative, 26 October 1989.

<sup>22</sup>Clapham, 157; and Korn, 165.

<sup>23</sup>William A. Fought, "A Re-Appraisal of Ethiopian Agricultural Prospects," USAID, 1 April 1988, 2. This report puts Ethiopia's population at 37.5 million in 1979 and 40.9 million in 1987. The Ethiopian government has estimated its 1987 population at 45.9 million, a figure accepted as generally valid by the World Bank and most other aid donors.

<sup>24</sup>Fought, iii-iv.

<sup>25</sup>Henze, "Ethiopia's Economic Prospects for the 1990s," 3.

<sup>26</sup>International Labor Organization, "Socialism from the Grass Roots: Accumulation, Employment and Equity in Ethiopia," 397, cited in Clapham, 145.

<sup>27</sup>Jember, "A Case Study of the Health Component of Kebelle 41," cited in Clapham, 145.

<sup>28</sup>See Fought, iii-iv.

<sup>29</sup>Clapham, 175.

<sup>30</sup>Mengistu Haile Mariam, Address to the National Shengo, September 1987, cited in Clapham, 176.

<sup>31</sup>Dr. Daniel Teferra, "Performance of Ethiopia's Socialist Economy," paper prepared for A Discussion Roundtable on Ethiopia, Orkand Corp., 9 November 1989.

<sup>32</sup>Clapham, 174-179, offers an excellent analysis of the villagization program.

<sup>33</sup>"Organizational Statement" (text), Tigray People's Liberation Front, Voice of the Tigray Revolution in Amharic to



Ethiopia, 0400 GMT (21 October 1989). Translation by the Foreign Broadcast Information Service, 24 October 1989. (FBIS-AFR-89-204.)

<sup>34</sup>"Organizational Statement" issued by the Tigray People's Liberation Front.

<sup>35</sup>Programme of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front.

<sup>36</sup>For example, a TPLF spokesman in Washington recently told the writer that while it has a Marxist-Leninist party organization, the TPLF does not believe in trying to apply Marxist-Leninist agricultural policies to Ethiopia. He argued that individual farming and free market prices are the only way to stimulate agricultural production.

# The Contours of Contemporary Somali Politics

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*Africans truly lost faith in their own culture at a very profound level, while still clinging on to them as straws with substitutes and yearning for the values which had given meaning to life. From this arise personal dilemmas and social conflicts which on a national scale remain for the moment insoluble. Hence appear inappropriate and conflicting values and goals, loss of loyalties and solidarities, consequent abuse of power, corruption and waste of resources, none of it conducive to well-motivated and productive work, even apart from the burden of exploitation from without.*

--Aidan Southall, Presidential Address, African Studies Association Annual Meeting, 1987.

*Kinship is dead  
Humanness is dead  
Barbarism is here.*

--Aw Jamac Umer Isse, International Congress of Somali Studies, 1989.

### Introduction

While the peoples of Eastern Europe, in their search for democratic socialism, victoriously bring down one "oligarchic collectivist regime"<sup>1</sup> after another, the struggle for genuine democratic rights and humane governance in most Third World societies is rather grim. Whether in Central or South America, North or Sub-Saharan Africa, the Near or Far East, the human impulse toward liberty, sustenance, and equity is as contentious as ever.<sup>2</sup>

But it is in Africa where the times seem hardest.<sup>3</sup> More specifically, it is in the northeast part of the

continent where some of the most gruesome contradictions of development are being played out. Somalia, at the extreme corner of the Horn, is one such place. It is a country, like most of Africa, characterized by worsening pauperism, debilitating contests over authority, and desiccating cultural turpitude. While these aspects of the crisis have been developing at varying paces during the past three decades, their combined impact was underscored by the eruption of civil war during the summer of 1988. To date, nearly 30,000 are estimated to have lost their lives, the second largest city (Hargeysa) has been destroyed, and 400,000 have sought refuge in Ethiopia, a nation itself reeling from horrendous internal insurrections. The consequence is that, on the whole, Somalia is descending into, to borrow a phrase from Henry James, an "abyss of blood and darkness."

Most observers of the country and disciplined students are agreed on the severity of the situation.<sup>4</sup> This is the easy part. The real challenge, from my perspective, is to explain why one of the few nations in the continent with one ethnic group, one culture, one language, and one religion should be on the verge of self-destruction.<sup>5</sup> My initial thesis is that the popular analysis of Somali Studies has proven incapable of capturing the essence of Somali underdevelopment.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, an alternative paradigm, one that joins the structural and subjective malaise, is urgently needed.

### The Conventional Approach

Established scholarly explanations of the Somali crises come in two variants: (1) pitfalls of personalized power; and, (2) exclusionist and sectarian propensities of kinship. While, on occasion, these two lines of thinking are indirectly linked, each is analytically distinct and, in most cases, offered by their respective proponents as the single most

decisive variable in decoding the current chaos. Let us look briefly at each.

**The Psychosis of Personal Rule.** In African Studies, the most complete and elegant theoretical case for this thesis has been put forth by Jackson and Rosberg.<sup>7</sup> They postulate that contemporary African states are akin to absolutist and despotic governments of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As a result, post-independence African rulers are confronted with the dilemma of limitless power and all its seductions on the one hand, and the acute worries and anxieties that accompany deadly competition without laws on the other.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, Jackson and Rosberg write:

*In their statecraft, particularly in their awareness of the uncertainties and contingencies of personal power in the political worlds they inhabit, many of Africa's most successful rulers resemble Machiavelli's "Prince." Undoubtedly, many also would like to enjoy the power, control, and security -- The Sword--of Hobbes' Leviathan.<sup>9</sup>*

The myriad processes engendered by this situation of personalized power include a combining of the leader's whim and bureaucratic decision-making which, in turn, lead to the creation of a labyrinthine network of patronage whose nodal point is the leader. In the end, the maintenance of stability and management of political order depends on the "will, skill, and fortune" of the politician at the center. Jackson and Rosberg propose four types of personal rule: prince, autocrat, prophet, and tyrant. It is the last one which is of interest to this paper. Citing the likes of Idi Amin and Bedal Bokassa as examples par excellence, Jackson and Rosberg suggest that the most distinguishing feature of the tyrant is a lack of any semblance of acceptance by the public and, subsequently, the total reliance on brutality.

*Hence, because Tyrants possess power and the instruments of rule but not authority or legitimacy, even more than other personal rulers, the tyrannical ruler must rely upon power and fortune alone. Since he abuses his power and has many enemies, cunning and ruthlessness in the control and uses of his power are everything to him.<sup>10</sup>*

Most dissident organizations analyze the Somali situation in this way.<sup>11</sup> Opposition groups like the Somali National Movement (SNM) and Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF) nostalgically look back to the civilian years immediately following decolonization (1960-69). They view current ills as being directly attributable to a commandeering of national authority by President Siad Barre. The last twenty years of "tyrannical dictatorship" have delivered Somalia to a grisly carnival of fratricide and economic despair.<sup>12</sup> To stop the carnage and social hemorrhage, and to bring back democratic politics, they conclude the Tyrant must be met with a popular insurrection; thus, the Somali Salvation Democratic Front guerrilla wars of the 1970s and early 1980s, and the Somali National Movement infiltrations into the north and the beginning of civil war in 1988.

**The Centrifugality of Kinship.** Ever since the appearance of the pioneering work, Professor I. M. Lewis's *A Pastoral Democracy* (1961), kinship, as the pivotal and defining characteristic of Somali culture and politics, has been the dominant approach to Somali Studies.<sup>13</sup> The starting point is that, despite generally acknowledged common traits (e.g., language, religion) and ancestry, Somalis, as befits a highly decentralized (i.e., stateless) nomadic society, are divided into major clan-families (see Figure 1, pg. 94). These are the *Saab*, the *Irir*, and the *Darrood*.<sup>14</sup> Each, in turn, has its own sub-families which, further, break down into numerous lineage segments, all the way down to the homestead (*Rer*). This intricate lineal deltoid is delicately held together by two practices: (1) a loosely accepted set of unwritten codes called *Xeer*; and (2) a collective blood-paying program called the *diya*.

The central arguments of Lewis and his followers are two: that pastoral Somalis, given communal access to the range and family ownership of the means of reproduction (the herd), are highly egalitarian and democratic; and that, primordial affinities notwithstanding, theirs is highly "anarchic" society, and, consequently, one susceptible to frequent internecine feuds.

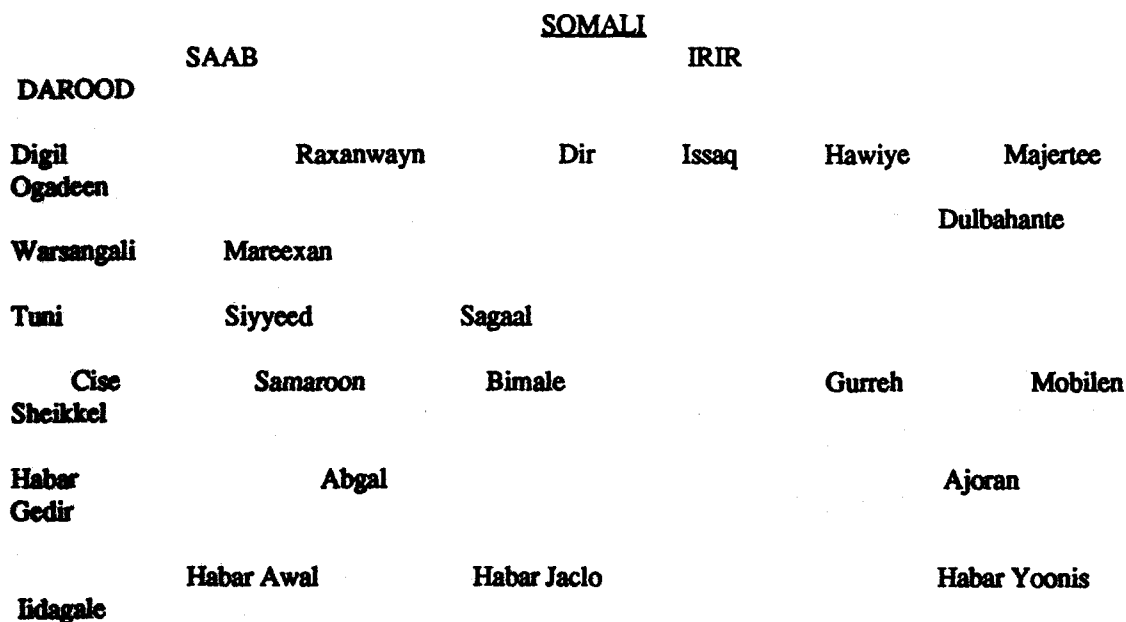
In their attempt to explicate the current crises, scholars of this school submit that the causal factors should be sought in these nomadic tendencies towards fragmentation. Put another way, long-lasting pastoral clanism has invaded the fragile urban

setting. This siege of the city, the symbol of modern rationality and order, testifies to the enduring tenacity of traditional clanist culture. Lewis has recently written:

*In the present Somali vortex, then, clan and lineage ties are definitely born-again. In fact, of course, they never died. . . Any realistic assessment of future trends has to acknowledge that Somali nationalism evidently retains its segmentary character and has not been transformed into a modern organic mode.*<sup>15</sup>

their socially patterned and conditioned circumstances.<sup>17</sup> The point is, then, not to obliterate the individual's role and impose a totalizing structuralism on the historical process. Rather, it is to emphasize the difficulty of artificially dislodging human agency from the river-bed within which each individual is obliged to operate. Clan-based analysis suffers both from ahistoricity and theoretical confusion. In the former, pastoralism, and its concomitant traits like communitarianism, is seen as an original condition that is immune to history and change. Conceptually, the confusion arises as kin-

Figure 1: Genealogical Chart of Somalia



These two variants of the conventional treatment of Somali society have merit: the first focuses on individual behavior and choices; the latter underscores traditional corporate values as a continuing element in African development. But the strength of each is also its weakness. For instance, idiosyncratically grounded studies of African politics seem to forget, as Jackson and Rosberg do, that neo-patrimonial rule, despite its apparently personalized form, is inconceivable without a context of historically delineated societal relations.<sup>16</sup> For individuals are not isolated organisms floating in an environment devoid of specific structural density. To the contrary, even in places like England and France (the *locus classicus* of neo-patrimonial rule), those absolutist monarchs were not wholly free from

ship and clanism are deployed interchangeably. Consequently, in a scheme of this sort, the crises are a reflection of what Somalis, across the ages, have always indulged in, i.e., agnatic splinter and strife. Finally, the traditional paradigm, in both its guises, leaves the state unproblematicized with precious little attention to its origins, constitution, or changing character.

While we acknowledge the contributions of conventional interpretations, the rest of this paper attempts to go beyond them. The basic premise here is that the parameters of the current conjuncture are marked by (a) difficulties that ensue from endogenous limits within, and the clash of two different historical modes of livelihood (the first is subsistence which is kin-ordered; the other is

modern and commodity-ordered); and (b) problems associated with the creation of a viable national polity or state.<sup>18</sup> This way of formulating the subject matter, we may add, makes it possible to attend to shortcomings of the conventional approach and, at the same time, takes account of Basil Davidson's theories regarding the essential unity between the [Somali] people and the rest of the region and the world.

### **Towards An Alternative Paradigm**

**The Clash of Historical Modes of Livelihood.**<sup>19</sup> Subsistence-based societies (e.g., pastoralists or peasant cultivators) have been the norm in traditional Africa. In such early social formations, material production/reproduction, cultural and political definition were intertwined. In production, for example, these ancient and reciprocal modes had their strengths (and still do where they survive intact) in meeting the basic needs of the community (except, of course, in times of great droughts or other natural calamities). Their weakness has been an inability to produce surplus to keep up with the growing needs and wants of rising populations.

In the realm of politics and culture, Professor Lewis is right in his initial characterization of Somali society as stateless and democratic, the latter to the exclusion of women. Every adult male had an unencumbered access to the deliberations of the *Rer*,<sup>20</sup> which was the basic unit of the bonds of kinship. But kinship is not limited to primordial ties only; it is supplemented by a cluster of revered lore. The first is essentially a product of genealogical and family connections, the latter attests to common wisdom or a code of transgenerational conduct (*Xeer*) that sets guidelines for social relations.<sup>21</sup> These elements together constitute the milieu in which both the private and the public are defined.

This, then, is the basis of kinship, an ideology commensurate with reciprocal production relations.

It is the argument of this paper that traditional pastoral Somali economy was typically communitarian in its production, and that kin-relations defined the political and cultural life.<sup>22</sup> However, with the inception of the colonial state (late 19th century), this communal mode was hitched to the internationally expanding mode of commodity production.<sup>23</sup> An articulation of these two modes has resulted in the emergence of class forms--e.g., pastoral producers, *dilaals*, and merchants.<sup>24</sup> Gradually, but surely, the colonial state and the merchants began to extract surplus from pastoral producers through an unequal barter in livestock and consumer items.<sup>25</sup> From the 1880s to the present, pastoral producers have underwritten the colonial order, the post-colonial state, and merchant groups. Livestock is the preeminent export of Somalia, representing well over 80 percent. But the returns to producers have been meager. Development expenditures for this dominant component of the rural sector have gone from three percent in 1963 to less than 14 percent in 1986-87.<sup>26</sup> The figures are more dismal when we add that most of these allocations were spent on improvements of marketing facilities. The neglect of peasant farming has been greater.

Equally relevant is that the 1980s have witnessed a significant change in prices (see Table 2). Stiff competition for the Saudi market (which accounts for over 90 percent of Somali exports) from countries like Australia have cut deep into what, at one time, was close to a Somali monopoly. The decline of oil prices in the early 1980s to the present, coupled with the internationalization of the market and the anxiety of the Somali state about the possibility of losing such a critical market, ushered in a sharp decline of export prices. This, in turn, severe-

**Table 2: Somalia Livestock Export Prices**

<b>ITEM</b>	<b>PRE-JANUARY 1985</b>	<b>POST-JANUARY 1985</b>	<b>% CHANGE</b>
Sheep	53	42	-21.75
Cattle	280	213	-23.95
Camels	450	390	-11.11

ly affected state revenues and producer incomes. Table 2 illustrates the decline in livestock export prices.

In short, the decline of prices, together with the stagnation of the volume of animals exported (livestock exports reached their highest in 1972), has created hard times for everyone.<sup>27</sup> Specifically, this has meant diminishing income for producers, fewer profits for merchants, and shrinking foreign exchange for the state.<sup>28</sup> More structurally, it is the pastoral producers who are in the greatest trouble. As Abdi Samatar tells us, despite the old axiom that pastoralists possess know-how to survive in the barren Somali terrain, continuing changes are turning pastoral living into an increasingly precarious undertaking.<sup>29</sup>

*The ecological destruction of the [range] in Somalia is rendering . . . pastoral [wisdom] and management systems defunct and incapable of reproducing this form of commercial pastoral production.*<sup>30</sup>

But the story of the clash between these two modes manifests itself most visibly in the interventions of the international financial institutions (e.g., International Monetary Fund and World Bank) and the debilitating weight of the Somali debt (most of it owed multilaterally and to other governments). Negative balance of payment (the consequence of both declining revenues and unwise spending), declining production, and a high rate of population growth (about 3.1 percent), drive the Somali state to look for external transfusions.<sup>31</sup> The IMF, perhaps as a last resort, and the World Bank, facilitate this borrowing by exacting a heavy price now so familiar to Africans.<sup>32</sup> The results are, among others, inflation (more than 110 percent annually), decay or disappearance of social services (including education), growing unemployment, and immiseration (especially among rural women and children).<sup>33</sup> Of course, this should not obscure the fact that Somalia has established a reputation of attracting relatively large amounts of aid, both in per capita terms and as a percentage of GNP (the latter hovers around 25 percent).<sup>34</sup> Nonetheless, Somalia is heavily in debt. The country has the highest debt-to-export ratio in the continent: nearly 2000 percent.<sup>35</sup> Reviewing the evidence for many parts of Africa, and taking a

measure of the weight of all of this, Manfred Bienefeld concludes:

*In a growing number of countries . . . the social political fabric is literally disintegrating in the face of economic challenges that cannot conceivably be met. Many are today sliding rapidly towards this abyss as accumulating debts, high real interest rates, and declining terms of trade exact a terrible toll on the economies and societies that have little or no further room for retrenchment after years of austerity.*<sup>36</sup>

Intrusion of a commodity-ordered social system (one that accents individualism and private welfare), coupled with shrinking material circumstances, have eroded the old linkage between ancestral ties and the *Xeer*. As individuals struggle to secure a foothold in, to borrow the marvelous title of one of Christopher Hill's works, "a world turned upside down," *Xeer* (the code of behavior for another universe) is shed or mutilated to make it fit these new and chaotic circumstances. With no alternative metaphysics to situate intra and inter group rights, obligations, and responsibilities, then, disconnected blood-ties have assumed an unprecedented place in the history of Somali peoples: they have become the **main** prism to interpret the social world. But, of course, this way of reading the current condition has not worked. Deprived of its civilizing (i.e., universalizing and restraining moral code) companion, raw propinquity supplants kinship with clanism. This decoupling of primordial ties and pan-Somali lore has broken, in Arthur Lovejoy's phrase, the "Great Chain of [Social] Being." Such, then, is one essential distinction between the concept of kinship and clanism in the Somali context.<sup>37</sup> As a result, contemporary Somalia is caught in the grip of ruinous clanism, which gets more bizarre as the peripheral modern sector continues to fail to produce a new and sustainable cultural foundation.

In sum, in a most basic sense, the collision between these two competing and interpenetrating ways of life, that is, subsistence/reciprocal and peripheral modernism, shape the current difficulties. It is a clash in which the old continues to be undermined while the new is powerless to stand up, a situation aggravated by the internal shortcomings of each

mode.<sup>38</sup> These fundamental contradictions are liable to produce bad governance.

**Governance and the State.** There is no arena in Somali society which reflects crises as vividly as the state. Before we look closely at the contours of the Somali state, however, a word on the definition, function, and dynamics of a viable state is in order. Initially, the state is the central public authority of a society, with monopoly over the use of force. In addition, the state is responsible for collective security and welfare, and the rules governing social relations of production. Beyond this rough identification, the construction of a state depends on the constellation of social groups in civil society. These social forces compete for a primary position to define and shape the national agenda. In a sense, therefore, the state is to be seen as a ledger of the political drama of a given society.

But how is a viable state fashioned?<sup>39</sup> The spirit of Somali folklore and communitarian theory, suggests that the making of sensible governance is dependent upon the degree of conjugation of at times contradictory, at other moments complementary, claims: the state as a taker/receiver and the state as a giver/provider. The state as a receiver implies general acceptance by, and support from, the people. This can take, at least, two forms. First, there is a minimum acquiescence to state demands, including, for example, reluctant obedience to the law, grudging payments of taxes, and low interest in overall state activities. In such circumstances, relationships between the state elite and the rest of the society are either on a downward slide towards mutual alienation (leading ultimately to rebellion or revolution) or are, at least, precariously tentative because most people are not yet sure about which way things will go. Somalis characterize such situations, and particularly the former, as *Allah Kubad* (God's curse).<sup>40</sup> In the second guise, giving to the state connotes genuine respect for the process of governance, implies healthy obedience to leadership, confidence in the future, and, subsequently, active willingness to give to the state, including efforts that border on the sacrificial. For Somalis, this is best described, in its most extreme form as *Hibbo* or *Naf Hur* (gift or self-sacrifice).<sup>41</sup>

The other face of governance is the state as a giver. The focus in this context is on structure and policy. The first, which refers to the state's foundation and

bureaucratic form, deals with the nature of authority and the density of power. Authentic providing is commensurate with decentralization of decision-making to regional and local levels. Such an empowerment of local committees breathes life and vitality into the concept of citizenship and, in the process, makes accountability of power a real possibility. Moreover, the creation of a bureaucracy and, therefore, the management of these levels of the state must be based on merit and talent rather than nepotism. But if the structure of central power mandates a bona fide degree of local autonomy and constitutional space, giving also means successful work in the area of economic development and protection of human rights. Economic development involves the conception and promotion of proper strategies to improve general welfare through growth with equity. This is not an argument for a reification of the state; rather, it is to acknowledge the durable wisdom (from Hamilton, List, and Gerschenkron to Horvat and Oscar Lang) that the state is a primary economic actor, and more so in less developed societies. Another important role of the state as a giver is in the protection of human rights. Human rights is used here in the combined spirit of the 1948 Universal Declaration; the 1966 International Covenants on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, and Civil and Political Rights; and, not least, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights of 1981. In their most elementary form, human rights include the right to physical security and protection against violence, freedom of intellectual pursuit and assembly, and the administration of justice. In Somalia, the people have initially given, but the state elite has defaulted again as giver. The results are an economic morass, atrophy of governance, and the growth of insurrectionist activities referred to at the beginning of this paper. But why has the Somali state become such a failure?

### **The Failure of the Somali State**

The degeneration of the Somali state can be attributed to two factors: (a) its pedigree and present form; and (b) the inability of opposition forces to go beyond belligerent hatred for the current regime and envision an alternative national agenda. As documented elsewhere, the social ancestry of the state harks back to colonialism.<sup>42</sup> The colonial state, by

definition and structure, was an alien institution imposed to fulfill private (and foreign) interests. Its progeny, the post-colonial state, despite the elan of reactive nationalism which witnessed its birth, has remained, in general, true to its filiation. Anatomically, the generation that brought independence to Somalia was made up of men who grew up under the shadow of British and Italian colonialism. Whether they were members of the Somali Youth League (SYL) and Hizbia Digale Midifle (HDM), predominant in Southern Somalia, or the Somali National League (SNL) and the United Somali Party (USP), which were located in the North, the leadership of the independence movements construed the enterprise as, essentially, a change of flags and personnel. Therefore, it was obvious from the moment the date of independence was set by the colonial authorities, that each segment of the incipient state class (mostly traders, artisans, lowly bureaucrats, and literate/religious elements) was less concerned with the heavy structural and development questions facing Somalia (with the exception of the missing territories)<sup>43</sup> and bent on cornering the dispensations of decolonization. One issue which immediately came to the fore after the inauguration of the first government, i.e., the Aden Osman/Abdulrashid Sharmarkee administration of 1960, was the nature of the unification of the British and Italian Somalilands. In the composition of the new government, the politicians from the South took a lion's share, including the presidency, the prime ministership, more than two-thirds of the senior cabinet posts, and the two top posts in the military forces and the police. Moreover, Mogadishu was designated the capital of the union. Naturally, Northerners, with some prescience, felt taken. While many believed the promise of rotation of leadership, others thought the whole region would now become a neglected outpost, especially given the fact that Hargeysa was nearly one thousand miles of dirt road away. It was partly as a result of these suspicions and grievances that, in December 1961, a small band of young Sandhurst-trained (and some from other British elite academies) junior officers from the North attempted to take over major towns in the region. The revolt was quickly put down, but its echo continued to reverberate through the decades as a signal of what could happen.

The growing regional discrepancy (inequity) was relegated to the background as the new state class made a rush for individual gains. With more and more foreign aid coming in<sup>44</sup> to assuage deficits and support development plans, little attention was given to the production sectors of the economy,<sup>45</sup> to the plight of the average Somali with an estimated GNP per capita of less than \$28, and to the national literacy rate of less than 8 percent (mostly townspeople).<sup>46</sup> Since the state was seen as the most strategic place to insure private wealth, this resulted in the creation of more political parties. In the first post-independence national elections of 1964, amid sharp accusations of corruption and fraud, eighteen parties took part. Only three of them had any national standing.<sup>47</sup> When the ballots were counted, the SYL emerged as the continuing majority party, with 69 out of 123 seats. Soon after the new National Assembly was convened, however, 21 of the deputies from the competing parties joined the SYL.

The mushrooming of political parties on the eve of elections and their immediate disappearance (even after winning seats) became a peculiar feature of the Somali experiment with liberal democracy. That this kind of political competition was symptomatic of deeper maladies was confirmed by the general elections of 1969, the last free elections held in Somalia: more than 60 parties filed over 1000 candidates to vie for 122 seats. To guarantee victory, the Cigal regime changed the organization of the SYL by making the Prime Minister (Cigal) also the leader of the party, transgressing established separation of power within the party. In addition, the government openly raided the national treasury (to the tune of \$5 million) to buy votes, and pressured the chief of the National Police Force (General M. A. Musa) to put his troops at the disposal of SYL party faithful. Finally, electoral rules were altered from proportional representation to winner take all, an innovation that was seen to suit the "government party" well. Combined, these factors marked the heavy premium put on parliamentary seats. As Lewis writes:

*With such intense competition involving an unprecedentedly large number of senior civil servants who [left] their posts to enter the lists, electoral expenses had been unusually heavy, and those who*



*had succeeded in gaining a seat in the National Assembly were naturally anxious to recover their costs at the earliest possible opportunity. In a country where the annual budget was running at approximately [\$35 million], some candidates are estimated to have spent as much as [\$30,000].*<sup>48</sup>

There were hardly any national issues debated. On the contrary, to ensure attention and have a chance of winning, each candidate identified his campaign with sub-lineage interests. These tactics accelerated the demise of kinship and the growing rise of clanism. At any rate, the elections of 1969 were the bloodiest in post-colonial Somalia. More than 40 people were killed and many others injured. The SYL won 73 seats, the SNC had 11, and the rest went to other smaller parties. When the counting was over, nearly four dozen defeated candidates challenged the results, but they found no place to take their cases. The Supreme Court ruled that, on technical grounds, it lacked any legal authority to adjudicate. With the last vestiges of fairness and constitutionality discarded, the new parliament convened. Every new deputy was set on retrieving his (all were male) campaign expenses and, therefore, to secure a favorable place in the distribution of power and privilege. The institution was transformed into what Lewis aptly called "a sordid marketplace," with no attention to the needs of the society at large. After a few days of haggling, all but one (the former prime minister, Abdulrazak Xusein) crossed the floor and joined the SYL. Consequently, Somalia, for all practical purposes, became a one party state and Cigal formed the largest cabinet ever.

In the end, as it became increasingly clear that Somali parliamentary democracy had become a travesty, many began to openly question its relevance to their lives. The downfall came with the assassination of President Sharmarke by a member of his own police force on 15 October 1969. Six days later, the armed forces staged a bloodless and popular coup.

### **Militarism and the Hacking of the State**

The first few years of military rule in Somalia were as heady and emotionally charged as the period before and immediately after independence. General Siad Barre and the Supreme Revolutionary

Council (SRC) received a tumultuous welcome. They were seen as heroes who had left the barracks to save the nation. This feeling was reinforced by the trials of civilian politicians, by new and inflated rhetoric of nationalistic socialism, and buttressed by an expansion of the public sector, selection of an official orthography for the Somali language, and a massive campaign of adult literacy.

But this euphoria began to wane in the mid 1970s. By then, it had become obvious that the SRC was not intent on restoring democracy, as they promised, but would keep to themselves more concentrated power and privileges.<sup>49</sup> The war with Ethiopia (1977-78) would mark a watershed. With defeat came acrimony and blame. Many were executed (most of them military officers) for challenging the conduct of the war and Siad's leadership.<sup>50</sup> Many more were interned, and a suffocating air of mutual suspicion and fright descended on Somalia. Fleeting dissidence turned into organized opposition, with the establishment of the Somali Democratic Action Front (SODAF) in Nairobi. Three years later, SODAF disintegrated and was replaced by the Somali Salvation Front (SSF), established in Addis Ababa. These organizations were constituted of ex-politicians, senior civil servants, and traders (most from the Majerteen lineage) who had lost some standing under the SRC. The SSF made a couple of feeble military forays in 1979 and 1980, but these were not serious enough to worry the regime.

The weakness of the military state became conspicuous with the disappearance of Soviet economic aid and technical assistance in early 1978, and the undertow of global recession. Thus, the 1980s began inauspiciously. The more state legitimacy declined, the greater became the regime's capriciousness. A failing economy, political delegitimation, and premeditated repression were particularly felt in the North, re-awakening long suppressed discontent over regional neglect. In 1980, the Somali National Movement (SNM) was formed in London. Intellectuals, businessmen, mullahs, former military officers, disgruntled cabinet ministers, and diplomats (mainly from the Issaq clan), with varying ideologies, announced their commitment to overthrow Siad Barre's regime by the force of arms. Looking for a closer base to Somalia, the SNM, much like the SSF before them, were granted

operational room by Ethiopia, and later received some financial contributions from Libya.<sup>51</sup>

Before the summer of 1988, these dissident movements were little more than an occasional nuisance to the regime. Their internal cohesion was problematic, falling into a deadly factionalism. Moreover, they were unsuccessful in recruiting active followers or in establishing footholds inside Somalia. The regime stepped up its efforts to undercut any new popularity by the opposition forces by giving special favors to areas not yet tainted by the SSF or SNM, while unleashing a reign of terror and pillage in those areas viewed as sympathetic to the dissidents, especially in the North. Military and Party (Somali Socialist Revolutionary Party) officials assigned to the North were, and still are, invariably Southerners, with close ties to the family of Siad Barre.<sup>52</sup> Such officials have taken advantage of this and, to this day, treat Northern Somalia as a conquered territory. It is important to note, however, that the various lineage groups in the North (i.e., Issaq, Samaroon, Dulbahante, Warsangali, and Isse) have not all been treated equally. This strategy, designed to create suspicion and division among Northerners, has singled out the Issaq. The Issaq have been labeled as a "greedy, egotistical, and savage people who are committed to the break up of the North and South, the subjugation of their neighbors, and the destruction of nationhood."<sup>53</sup> Consequently, they have borne the brunt of state brutality. This is an ugly return to the colonialist tactic of "divide and rule," which has already created poisonous disaffinities amongst Somalis. Evidence trickling out of the North in particular suggests that this strategy is working, as mutual butchery has become a way of life.<sup>54</sup>

By the mid 1980s, both Somalia and Ethiopia were confronted with severe problems: continuing hostilities between themselves and growing insurgencies within each state. Sapped of vitality by the insurrections in Eritrea and Tigre and the restlessness in the Oromo areas, and the Ogaden, and a declining post-revolutionary economy, Ethiopia was desperate. The Somali leadership, on its part, was also facing similar difficulties. Early in 1988, the two states signed a non-aggression treaty. This created an "eleventh hour" situation for the SNM, the most militarily credible opposition group. Bereft of a hinterland, and deprived of official

Ethiopian support, the SNM leadership, during August 1988, decided to fight their way into northern Somalia and, in their own words, "liberate their clan territory:" the Hargeysa, Berbera, and Burco triangle.

The result was a bloodbath. Swiftly, to benefit from the element of surprise, SNM fighters overran many villages until they captured Burco and Hargeysa. The regime was adamant about crushing the insurgency. Immediately, military garrisons in every base in the North, together with reinforcements from other parts of the country, were deployed. The battles were fierce. Hargeysa was the target of aerial bombardment and heavy artillery fire. Within days, the second largest city of Somalia lay in ruins, more than 70 percent destroyed. Its citizens fled across the border to Ethiopia, adding to the exodus. At the time of this writing, all of northern Somalia is a lawless territory. The regime controls and continues to terrorize what is left of the urban areas, and the SNM roams around the countryside, complicating more the fragile nomadic life.<sup>55</sup>

## Conclusions

The past decade has been a particularly painful one in Somalia. This is the effect of a conjunction of four deadly factors: (1) a decomposing pastoral/peasant ecology and economy in the face of peripheral modernism; (2) diminishing moral capital and generative values; (3) deranged governance<sup>56</sup>; and (4) factious dissident groups unable to unite and mobilize the Somali people for a new agenda of development.<sup>57</sup> Consequently, Somalia enters the 1990s with few friends,<sup>58</sup> while it sinks deeper into a severe case of collective delirium and destruction. Dowden has already glimpsed the real likelihood of mutual predacity:

*One day last week, we stopped in a deserted village and the guerrillas led me to where lunch was being prepared. Lunch was a camel. Its hind quarters squatted comfortably on the ground but the rest of it, from its fifth vertebra, was missing. The lopped neck and head lay a few feet away, and starving cats licked the blood soaked earth. In between men with machetes hacked and chopped with a welter of gore. It is my abiding image of Somalia.<sup>59</sup>*

Such a future is likely, but not inevitable. On the contrary, there are quite a few things that intelligent and solidaristic human beings can do about it. But this is an agenda for another time.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>This phrase is borrowed from Ralph Miliband, "Reflections on the Crisis of Communist Regimes," *New Left Review* 177 (September/October 1989): 31.

<sup>2</sup>For a variety of ways of interpreting this point, see World Bank, *World Development Report 1988* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Ruth Leger Sivard, *World Military and Social Expenditures, 1987-88* (Washington, DC: World Priorities); Gro Harlem Brundtland and the World Commission on Environment and Development, *Statement to the 42nd Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations* (19 October 1987); and Amnesty International, *Annual Reports, 1988 and 1989* (London: Amnesty International Publications, 1989).

<sup>3</sup>Deepening existential crises in most of Africa are testified to by: a shrinking capital formation; declining per capita consumption, this year estimated to drop to the levels of 1960; a debt burden of more than \$143 billion (over \$400 for every African, in a continent with a GNP per capita of less than \$400); the largest number of displaced peoples in the world (nearly one in every 140 is a refugee); an explosion of debilitating diseases like AIDS (over 300,000 in 1989, and another 2.5 million infected with the HIV virus); misrule by petty autocracies across the African political landscape; and a frightening sense of an impending eco-disaster.

<sup>4</sup>See, for example, the riveting journalistic account of Richard Dowden, "Somalia is Disintegrating into Anarchy," *The Independent*, 10 October 1989, 17; and the dense and scholarly analysis of Abdi Samatar, *The State and Rural Transformation in Northwestern Somalia, 1884-1988* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989).

<sup>5</sup>Dowden, 17.

<sup>6</sup>Underdevelopment is defined here as "an historical process culminating in the stifling of human creativity, skill, and self confidence, maintained by the exterior squeeze of a changing world [political] economy and the inner functioning of an exploitative social system." James H. Mittelman, *Out From Underdevelopment* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), 161.

<sup>7</sup>Jackson and Rosberg assert that their perspective, which is in the "tradition of Political Science," is "not about society, culture, psychology, or economics," but informed by three schools of political analysis: "classical political theory"; "Weber's sociology of authority and the sociology of clientism"; and "comparative governmental theory." Robert H. Jackson and Carl G. Rosberg, *Personal Rule in Black Africa: Prince,*

*Autocrat, Prophet, Tyrant* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

<sup>8</sup>Their fundamental assumption is the demise of the colonial state and the transfer of state power to African politicians has been of deep political import. Because the colonial administration was appointed and delegated specific duties by the imperial authority, power was circumscribed. The post-colonial state, on the other hand, assumes all the power without demarcation and accountability. In short, the critical factor in African politics is the absence of any tradition of institutionalized forms of rule--the basic yardsticks for constitutionalism and stable governance.

<sup>9</sup>Jackson and Rosberg, 9.

<sup>10</sup>Jackson and Rosberg, 235.

<sup>11</sup>Ismail Hurreh, "Peace for the Horn of Africa in the Political Program of the SNM," paper presented at the Fourth Annual Conference on Conditions for the Possibilities of Peace in the Horn of Africa, New York, NY, 26-28 May 1989.

<sup>12</sup>See any issue of *Horizon*, the newsletter of the Somali National Movement (SNM), which is published in the US.

<sup>13</sup>I. M. Lewis, *A Pastoral Democracy: A Study of Pastoralism and Politics Among the Northern Somalis of the Horn of Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961); and David Laitin and Said Samatar, *Somalia: Nation In Search of a State* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987).

<sup>14</sup>Most of these scholars are aware that the *Saabs*, who live in the riverside areas of the South, have long mixed herding with peasant farming. Traditionally, this has been a small component of the population and economy of Somalia.

<sup>15</sup>I. M. Lewis, "The Ogaden and the Fragility of Somali Nationalism," paper prepared for the International Conference on the Conflict in the Horn of Africa, Madrid, Spain, 12-14 September 1989, 11-12. There is some overlap between the arguments of Lewis and Hyden's assertions based on an "economy of affection." For the latter, see Goran Hyden, *No Shortcut to Progress* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

<sup>16</sup>This is also one of a number of major limits of the "rational choice" approach (both in its Marxism and right-wing guises). Its game-theoretic matrix and focus on methodological individualism deprives it of explaining how each individual comes to that moment of choice--i.e., the social construction of choice. A distinguished and honorable representation of "rational choice" approach in African Studies is Robert H. Bates, ed., *Toward a Political Economy of Development: A Rational Choice Perspective* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988). For a piercing critique of the whole enterprise, see Ellen Meiksins Wood, "Rational Choice Marxism: Is the Game Worth the Candle?" *New Left Review* 177 (September/October 1989): 41-88.

<sup>17</sup>Perry Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (London: Verso, 1974).

<sup>18</sup>Arranging the analysis in this form--while immediately conjuring up the dualism of modernization theory--should be interpreted, as will be done in the text, in the spirit of the debates on the articulation of modes of production. For this, see Harold Wolpe, ed., *The Articulation of Modes of Production* (London: Routledge, 1980); Donald Crumney and C. Stewart eds., *Modes of Production in Africa* (London: Sage, 1981); and Aidan Foster-Carter, "The Modes of Production Controversy," *New Left Review* 107 (January-February 1978): 47-77.

<sup>19</sup>An historical mode of livelihood is a collectively created and shared set of material, political, and cultural practices and relations that bind together, and give marked resemblance among, individuals, groups, and generations. This is similar to Burke's sense of society--a covenant "between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born."

<sup>20</sup>Of course, even among the males, age was an internal mechanism to differentiate between individuals. Provided one's wits were well honed with age, older males carried great credibility and clout compared to their juniors.

<sup>21</sup>This should not be construed as if there were no internal strife. Rather, it is to intimate the availability of accepted and workable ways of dealing with conflicts.

<sup>22</sup>Richard Pankhurst, "The Trade of the Gulf of Aden Ports of Africa in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century," *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 3 (1965): 36-82. Of course, we are not suggesting the complete insularity of Somali pastoralists from the outside world. What we are proposing is the logic of the economy was based on production for consumption (i.e., the production of use-value). Moreover, while this conception does not romanticize ancient Somali pastoralism, it does challenge the Hobbesian stereotype of early life as "nasty, brutish, and short." On the contrary, we imply that those "wandering" communities enjoyed a modicum of liberty and an adequate diet (low in calories but enough in protein needs) which minimized oppression and deficiency diseases. For an exploration of the dietary and health conditions of earliest human societies (particularly hunter-gatherer peoples), which collaborates our thesis, see Mark Nathan Cohen, *Health and the Rise of Civilization* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

<sup>23</sup>The characteristics of this mode of livelihood are: (a) a separation of the realization of the use-value and exchange value of commodities; (b) the existence of markets for commodities; (c) the availability of a medium of exchange (money); and (d) the development of a social division of labor between sectors and units producing various types of commodities. Ben Crow and Mary Thrope, et. al., *Survival and Change in the Third World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 107.

<sup>24</sup>On this, see Abdi Samatar, Lance Salibury, and Jonathan Bascom, "The Political Economy of Livestock Marketing in Northern Somalia," *African Economic History* 17 (1988): 81-97; and my, *Socialist Somalia: Rhetoric and Reality* (London: Zed Books, 1988), especially chapter one.

<sup>25</sup>Jeremy Swift, "The Development of Livestock Trading in a Pastoral Economy: The Somali Case," in *Pastoral Production and Society: Proceedings of the International Meeting on Nomadic Pastoralism*. Paris, December 1-3, 1976, edited by L'Equipe Ecologie et Anthropologie des Sciences Pastorales (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

<sup>26</sup>Abdi Samatar, "Social Class and Economic Restructuring in Pastoral Africa: Notes from Somalia," *African Studies Review*, forthcoming (1990).

<sup>27</sup>One measure of the precipitous decline of incomes in Somalia is evidenced by trends in real official minimum wages. If 1980 is taken as 100, by 1985-86 this figure has contracted to an unbearable low of 22. See, Dharan Ghai, "Economic Growth, Structural Change and Labour Absorption in Africa: 1960-86," UNRISD, Discussion Paper No. 1, (Geneva, 1987).

<sup>28</sup>For example, the balance of payment of Somalia in 1985, 1986, and 1988 has been running a deficit around \$220 million, \$371 million, and \$380 million respectively. The latter is nearly five times the export earnings. *Recovery*, 3, 1-2 (October 1989): 27. This syndrome of diminishing terms of trade underlies the deadly force of "the Iron Law" of commodities, which triggers wildly fluctuating prices while, in the end, the value of imports continues to rise.

<sup>29</sup>Abdi Samatar, "Social Classes," forthcoming.

<sup>30</sup>Abdi Samatar, "Social Classes," forthcoming.

<sup>31</sup>In an attempt to mollify these difficulties, the government reached an agreement with the IMF, in 1985-86, for \$25 million in stand-by credit and another \$64.5 million in agricultural assistance. However, these arrangements ran into immediate trouble as disagreements developed over currency rates. Later, a deal was cut anyway. In late 1989, the Somali shilling's official value is Sh500 to \$1, and over Sh1100 to \$1 in the illegal market. This is a nearly 50 percent devaluation since July 1989.

<sup>32</sup>Structural Adjustment Policies are now the primary policy framework for long-term development aid to Sub-Saharan Africa. However, these policies are known to emphasize short-term growth, strengthening private (usually rich) interests, and banishing the common good from the development discourse and agenda. Bade Onimode, ed., *The IMF, World Bank and the African Debt: The Economic Impact* (vol. 1) and *The IMF, World Bank and the African Debt: The Socio-Political Effect* (London: Zed Books, 1989). Carl Lancaster, "Economic Restructuring in Sub-Saharan Africa," *Current History* (May 1989): 213-16, 244; Economic Commission for Africa, *African*

*Alternative Framework to Structural Adjustment Programs for Socio-Economic Recovery and Transformation*, (Addis Ababa: ECA, 1989); and Thandike Mkandike, "The Road to Crises, Adjustment and De-Industrialization: The African Case," *African Development* 13, 1 (1988): 5-31.

<sup>33</sup>There is evidence that some growth has taken place in agriculture, especially in maize and sorghum production, between 1984-86. However, this relapsed in 1987-88 by 15 percent and three percent respectively. The infant mortality rate for 1987 was 151 per 1000 live births; access to drinking water is available for 11 percent of the population; and education has a budget allocation of two percent of total government expenditures. For more, see United Nations Development Program, *Somalia: Annual Development Cooperation Report, 1987* (Mogdishu: United Nations Development Program, 1988). On the general African and Middle Eastern scene, see UNICEF's reports, as acknowledged by the World Bank, which document a 10-15 percent fall in the living standards between 1983-87, and deteriorating welfare indicators in the 32 poorest societies. A. Berg, *Malnutrition: What Can be Done?* (Baltimore: World Bank, 1987); Giovanni Andrea Cornia and others, *Adjustment with a Human Face: Protecting the Vulnerable and Promoting Growth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); and J. P. Grant, *The State of the World's Children* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

<sup>34</sup>1987-88 aid commitments to Somalia were estimated at \$360 million (at 1986 prices and exchange rates), of which a significant part would go to feed refugees.

<sup>35</sup>UN Africa Recovery Program, "African Debt: The Search for Solutions." Briefing Paper no. 1, New York, (June 1989): 1. Somali total debt is \$2.53 billion, most to multilateral creditors and foreign governments. This is an incomprehensible amount for a country with a GNP per capita of less than \$280. Debt service payments are now (1989) well over 127 percent of export earnings.

<sup>36</sup>Manfred Bienefeld, "The Lesson of History and the Developing World," *Monthly Review* (July/August 1989): 10-11.

<sup>37</sup>Some conventional scholars of Somali society continue to argue that the internecine wars of the present are not different from such earlier times as *Xaaramay Cun* (the time of eating filth), in the 1920s. Consequently, they suggest that Somali "clan chiefs" can still come together to settle these issues, as in the old days. Our argument is not to deny the historical role of "sultans," nor to unnecessarily inflate the magnitude of the current crises. What we stress, however, is the continuing decomposition of the old material and cultural affinities and connections, and the presence of new forms of authority--e.g., the post-colonial state. In brief, all these add up to very different

circumstances, actors, and challenges. This new configuration of social relations have enfeebled (perhaps fatally) traditional leadership. Field notes, 1989.

<sup>38</sup>We have dealt with this in A. I. Samatar, "The Exigencies of Self-Determination, Territorial Integrity, and Collective Self-Reliance," in *Conflict and Peace in the Horn of Africa*, ed. Nzongola-Ntalaja, (African Studies Association, forthcoming 1990).

<sup>39</sup>Viable connotes capability to be inclusive of the vast majority, undertake a national agenda of development and, consequently, enjoy popular legitimacy. For more, see A. I. Samatar, "Horn of Africa," forthcoming.

<sup>40</sup>The period between the end of the Somali-Ethiopian war (1978) and the inception of the current civil strife in Somalia can be interpreted as an example of this moment of state-societal relationship. It is important to note that on a very recent fieldtrip to Somalia by this author, a number of senior state officials (including two members of the cabinet) used this exact expression to denote the status of the leadership of Siad Barre. Field notes, July 1989.

<sup>41</sup>The attitudes of the vast majority of the Somali people towards the state on the eve and morrow of independence, and during the early years of the current regime are close examples of acts of "giving to the state" in the *Hibbo* fashion. Evidence for this can be immediately gleaned from, among others, Somali poetry and *Heello* (folk songs) of the time and the omnipresent spirit of *Iska Wax Ougabso* (self-help/free labor).

<sup>42</sup>A. I. Samatar, *Socialist Somalia*, chapters three and four.

<sup>43</sup>Colonization by European imperialism of the Horn of Africa resulted in the division of the Somali territory into five different colonies. Two have joined to make the present Somalia. The others are Djibouti, Ogaden, and the Northern Frontier District of Kenya. This inheritance from colonialism has been and continues to be a source of national trauma.

<sup>44</sup>Ozay Mahmet, "Effectiveness of Foreign Aid: The Somali Case," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 9, 1 (1971): 31-47.

<sup>45</sup>The GNP, at this time, was a puny \$56 million.

<sup>46</sup>It was becoming normal to allocate nearly 20 percent of the operational budget to the defense forces, which were being expanded. This was primarily connected to a national commitment to "liberate" the missing territories.

<sup>47</sup>These were the Somali Youth League, the Somali National Congress, and the Somali Democratic Union. A. I. Samatar, *Socialist Somalia*, 67.

<sup>48</sup>I. M. Lewis, *A Modern History of Somalia: Nation and State in the Horn of Africa* (London: Longman, 1980), 296. See also E. A. Bayne, "Somalia's Myths are Tested," *American Universities Fieldstaff Reports: Northeast Africa Series* 16, 1 (October 1979): 7.

<sup>49</sup>Perhaps the core of the arbitrary powers assumed by the SRC (and indirectly Siad Barre) is the 1970 *Power to Detain Law* against which individuals have no safeguards. The first to fall victims to this law were Generals Caisnanshe and Gabeire (two very senior coup makers) who were executed early in 1971. The two generals were reported to have questioned the drift of the new state class and its monopolization of power. Later, in 1975, ten theologians would suffer the same fate.

<sup>50</sup>Dozens of dissidents lost their lives during and after the failed coup attempt of 1978.

<sup>51</sup>A significant portion of the SNM's financial support comes from the Issaq diaspora, particularly those in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf area.

<sup>52</sup>One of the most conspicuous sources for the compounding delegitimation of the Somali state is President Barre's unabashed favoritism to his immediate blood relations and others related through marriage. Usually, this practice comes in two forms: arbitrary promotions to the most strategic positions of the state bureaucracy, and the granting of licenses to engage in the small but lucrative import/export trade of the country that results in access to hard currency. Field notes, 1989. Also, see Osman Mohamoud, "Somalia: Crisis and Decay in an Authoritarian Regime." *Horn of Africa* 4, 3 (1981): 11.

<sup>53</sup>This was a point hammered home by most senior state officials during interviews conducted during the summer of 1989. Field notes, 1989.

<sup>54</sup>The leadership/forces of the SNM have, thus far, failed to conceive a counter ideological thrust—one which affirms the historical and contemporary commonalities of the peoples of the region or the country. Field notes, 1989.

<sup>55</sup>Dowden, p. 17; and Amnesty International, *Somalia: A Long-Term Human Rights Crisis* (London: Amnesty International Publications, September 1988 and 1989).

<sup>56</sup>Siad Barre has announced recently that he would like to negotiate with anyone for peace and create an atmosphere for a multi-party political order. On the face of it, these are good sentiments, but they are seen by most, including this author, as empty pontifications to mollify pressure from the outside, including the US.

<sup>57</sup>There are now five self-proclaimed opposition groups: SSDF, SNM, and the relatively newer Somali Patriotic Front, Somali Union Congress, and Somali Democratic Alliance. Field notes, July 1989. There are, of course, individual members of these organizations whose reflections go, on occasion, beyond the common vituperations of Siad Barre and intimate the possibility of sagacious thinking. For instance, see Ibrahim Megag Samater, "The Politics of Liberation: Some Reflections of the Practice of the Somali National Movement." *Somali Horizon* 9 (October/September/November [sic], 1987).

<sup>58</sup>For example, the US Chairpersons of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa (Rep. Howard Wolpe), the Subcommittee on International Economic Policy and Trade (Rep. Dan Gejdenson), and the Foreign Affairs Committee (Rep. Dante Fascell) spearheaded a successful effort to stop \$21 million in aid to Somalia from the US last year. Further, there is a new initiative to tie US aid to Somalia in the future to human rights. *Africa News* (May 29, 1989): 6-7.

<sup>59</sup>Dowden, p. 17.

# Domestic Political Dynamics in the Sudan

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Apocalyptic visions of hundreds of thousands of people starving while military commanders stop efforts to help them are common in current reports from the Sudan. Few who have been to the Sudan recently deny the accuracy of most of the dreadful images of a society in a state of collapse. The situation is marked by political instability, civil war, and famine. A country which little more than a decade ago could be proclaimed as the potential "Breadbasket of the Arab World" is now frequently simply identified as "a basket case" in international affairs.

This dramatic transition is to some degree a product of journalistic rhetoric rather than a careful assessment of realities. The Sudan of the mid-1970s had many problems which were ignored by Sudanese leaders and foreign observers, so that things were not as good as they now seem to have been. One might also hope that the current situation, while extremely serious, is not totally hopeless. However, it is clear that the basic political institutions seem incapable of coping with the crises facing the Sudan. Although the problems are economic and social as well as political, it seems clear that until more effective means of national coordination in terms of the political system are created, all problems will be basically insolvable.

## **The Basic Context**

The current crisis in the Sudan is really a cluster of related crises which feed upon each other. The present situation has firm roots in the past which cannot be ignored. These deep roots make a quick solution impossible and require a patient untangling of elements and gradual resolution of conflicts. In

the current situation, there are a number of elements which seem to have an important role in creating and maintaining the current crisis conditions.

One element is the existence of political institutions that reflect the continuing strength of sectarian and regional style groupings based on a heritage of religious and ethnic diversity. Another important element is the role of the military, and a third is the continuing civil war and the inability of governments to create a "national" sense of identity.

Each of these elements is shaped in important ways by the broad lines of Sudanese historical experience. The heritage of the past is important in determining the loyalties of the present. A survey of Sudanese history shows that regional and local loyalties have roots as far back as the eighteenth century. Structures of central control begin in the nineteenth century, and the special experience at the end of the nineteenth century provides a basis for the complex interaction between religion and national identity that is found in the Sudan. The historical experience provides the basis for the contemporary political structures and the problems of national integration reflected in the continuing civil war. It is the experience of the past two centuries that has, in fact, created the Sudan as it is known today.

**Local and Regional Identities.** At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Sudan did not exist as a separate and identifiable entity in social, ethnic, or political terms. The territories now included within the boundaries of what is the largest country in Africa contained a wide diversity of smaller states and extended ethnic communities. In the north along the Nile river was the Funj Sultanate, which had developed as a small, relatively centralized state in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and which was experiencing civil wars and divisions by the end of the eighteenth century. A second sultanate existed in Darfur, in the west. Around these two states were tribal-ethnic groupings, some basically nomadic and others more settled. By the end

of the eighteenth century, most of the people in this northern region were identified in some way as Muslim, and many, although not the majority, could be identified as Arab. For most of the peoples of the northern Sudan, Arabic provided the medium of supra-group communication, regardless of the group's own language. Similarly, organizations of disciples of Muslim holy men or of students of famous Muslim teachers provided the major supra-group organizations other than the larger sultanates.

In the regions of the southern third of the modern Sudan, there were also well-established communities of varying sizes. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, major groups like the Dinka, Nuer, Shilluk, and Azande had established substantial networks of interaction and control. In addition, there were many smaller groups which were independent communities. Most of these groups, large or small, were pastoral or herding peoples with distinctive languages and cultural traditions.

The consolidation of local and regional identities is an important heritage from this era. When, in the past two decades, analysts have spoken of special local and regional identities, they are based on the units that had come into existence by the early nineteenth century, i.e., before the actual existence of an entity known as "the Sudan." At the broadest level, the distinction between those groups that used Arabic language and had some Islamic identification--who were largely in the northern part of the country--and the non-Arab, non-Muslim groups in the south was set by the beginning of the nineteenth century.

This heritage is, however, even more complex. The northern Arab-Muslim and southern, non-Arab, non-Muslim distinction is an oversimplification that can be misleading. Both north and south are significantly more complex in their inheritance of identities. In discussions of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), for example, the high visibility of Dinkas among its leadership is noted and when inter-group rivalries are identified within the SPLM, the units are largely identified through affiliation with the longstanding communal groupings from the eighteenth century. This is also true in the north, where Darfur regional loyalties have played a role, as have ethnic identities of non-Arab groups in the eastern Sudan, like the Bani Amir and the Hadandowa. The ethnic and regional

divisions of the 1980s and 1990s are part of what the modern Sudan inherits from its pre-modern history.

The Sudan emerged as a separate unit during the nineteenth century and came to include a great variety of groups. Within the political boundaries of the contemporary Sudan more than one hundred different languages are spoken, and there are at least fifty major ethnic groupings, with almost six hundred significant subgroups.<sup>1</sup> The "national" boundaries were drawn through a series of military conquests rather than voluntary association and union of the various groups. As a result, every government since a large Sudan was created has faced basic issues of control, integration, and identity-creation.

**Central Control.** The first unity of the Sudan was imposed by outside conquest. In the 1820s, the Ottoman governor of Egypt, Muhammad Ali, had begun a major program of modernizing reform. He used his new army, created as a part of that program, to conquer a number of areas, including the central Sudan. The Ottoman-Egyptian government gradually expanded its control, until by the 1870s most of the present-day Sudan was included within this Egyptian province. Although Ottoman-Egyptian rule was not popular, it did result in the creation of some significant, supra-tribal, supra-communal institutions, including a central government in Khartoum and a central army. Much of the army was recruited from local people, although the commanders were largely foreign.

It was as a result of Egyptian conquests that the southern peoples were brought under the control of the same government as the northerners. There was some expansion of commercial networks and movements of peoples so that some social integration began. However, force was the primary means of integration, and soon the development of the slave trade in the south created a tradition of tension and mistrust which more peaceful intercourse among the peoples could not overcome.

**Mahdism and National Identity.** The majority of people in both the north and the south came to resent Egyptian rule, and many different movements of opposition developed. The most important of these was a movement led by a Muslim teacher in the central Nile valley, Muhammad Ahmad, who preached that he was the Mahdi, or Guided One, who would bring an end to injustice on earth and



establish God's rule. For a variety of reasons, people from throughout the Sudan joined the movement of the Mahdi and revolted against the Egyptians.<sup>2</sup> Even some non-Muslims in the south accepted Mahdist leadership in the revolt against the Egyptians, although later relations between Mahdists and southerners were not as good.

The Mahdi became the first Sudanese ruler of a Sudanese state. Although he died in 1885 soon after the conquest of Khartoum, his successor, the Khalifah Abdallahi, consolidated the administration of the Mahdists, and the Mahdist state continued the tradition of centralized control and a centrally-commanded military. This state continued until it was defeated by invasion in 1896-1898 by a combined British and Egyptian effort.

In this way, the heritage of an independent Sudanese state was identified at the beginning of the twentieth century with the Mahdist Muslim group in the northern Sudan. The followers of the Mahdi, called Ansar, represented the largest single organization in the country, even after the defeat of the state. They were drawn from many different communal and regional groups, with the center of the Ansar following being in the western and central regions. For these people, "national" loyalty was loyalty to the Mahdist tradition and to the descendants of the Mahdi.

**Modern Popular Politics.** The British established a special form of imperial control in the Sudan. In principle, Great Britain and Egypt ruled jointly, in what was called the "Anglo-Egyptian Condominium." In practice, the British ruled the Sudan directly and were considered the imperial power. The Condominium was established by force of arms in both the north and the south. Until 1930, there were many local revolts requiring the dispatch of troops, and, even after that time, the final source of British rule was military power.

In this way, the British continued the tradition of establishing central governmental control by military conquest and were a military regime. In the first two decades, virtually every British administrator in the Sudan was a soldier and the government was only gradually "civilianized." Even in the later, more civilian administration, Sudanese played little role.

As a nationalist sentiment for having the Sudanese rule themselves began to develop in the 1920s, the

Mahdist leaders were a natural focal point. Sayyid Abd al-Rahman, a son of the Mahdi, became an articulate spokesperson for the idea of "Sudan for the Sudanese," and Sudanese nationalism came to have a natural Islamic tone to it.

Not all Sudanese Muslims, however, were Ansar, and the non-Ansar came to fear that the Mahdists would simply take over an independent Sudan. As a result, a second style of nationalism developed under the patronage of the major Muslim rival of the Ansar, the Khatmiyyah Tariqah, led by the Mirghani family. The Khatmiyyah was a well-organized devotional organization which had been established in the Sudan during the nineteenth century, and, like the Ansar, transcended local and regional groups. Its major centers of support were in the north central and eastern regions.

In the years following World War II, political parties were formed, and they gradually assumed the responsibilities first of consultation, then self-government, and then independent governance. The creation of political parties followed the pattern of the development of Sudanese nationalism. The parties were organized around the mass following of the Ansar and the Khatmiyyah. From 1945 until the present, the largest political parties (whether legal or, as at present, illegal) are the parties of the great Islamic organizations. The prime minister who was overthrown in the military coup last summer was Sadiq al-Mahdi, a great grandson of the Mahdi and head of the Ansar-supported Ummah Party. The other major party was the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) which was led by Muhammad Uthman al-Mirghani, the current head of the Khatmiyyah Tariqah.

The history of the development of nationalism and then of partisan politics was such that national identity and party affiliation came to mean association with one of the major "national" Islamic groupings. As the elections in 1986 showed, this correlation continues to be strong for most of the population in the Muslim areas of the Sudan. Although the proportion of votes for the two major parties is less than the 88 percent of the vote in the northern provinces which they received in the first parliamentary elections in 1953, these parties still received 70 percent of the votes in the northern provinces in 1986.

It should be added here that early nationalism and party politics tended to be confined to the northern Sudan. The southern regions were kept separate from the north during the British period. No region-wide political organizations emerged until the late 1940s, and then they were not associated with popular organizations which could mobilize large numbers of people in the way that the Ansar and Khatmiyyah could in the north. As a result, party politics also assumed a relatively northern tone, with active southern participation in the "national" political system being relatively limited.

**Heritage.** The contemporary crises have developed in a special context. There are distinctive regional and local identities which are deeply rooted. These can and do clash with central authority which is often associated with control imposed from the outside by military force. The sense of identity with the central governmental institutions is weak. In addition, as national politics developed, the most active organizations were identified with particular sectarian groups, and the southern regions were often excluded from effective participation. All of these conditions provide difficult obstacles to effective resolution of the major problems facing the Sudan today.

### **Role of the Military**

The military group that took control of the Sudanese government at the end of June 1989 is both the heir to this heritage and part of it. The current junta is the fourth group of military officers to seize the Sudanese government since Sudanese independence in 1956. There has been an alternation of civilian party rule and military rule which has come to assume a remarkably common pattern of interaction.

The first civilian parliament was elected in 1953 and was the body which assumed "self-governance" in the last days of British control and then proclaimed Sudanese independence at the beginning of 1956. The major parties were the Ansar and Khatmiyyah oriented groups. A third party also played an important role but had a history of association with the Khatmiyyah. The new government had difficulty in resolving a variety of problems and appeared to be collapsing into a state of partisan rivalries. Late in 1958, a group of senior military

officers led by Ibrahim Abboud took control of the government.

Abboud brought stability and a sense of purpose which gave him wide popular support initially. However, his regime became increasingly involved in a civil war in the south, was unable to manage national economic affairs effectively, and began increasing repression in the north. Civilian demonstrations and strikes ultimately led to the October Revolution of 1964, which resulted in the replacement of the military government by a civilian one.

Elections in 1965 brought the old civilian parties back into power, and partisan rivalries again threatened the effectiveness of the central government. After a series of crises involving the economy, the growing civil war in the south, and real governmental instability, a group of younger military officers led by Jaafar al-Numayri took control of the government in May 1969.

The Numayri regime went through a number of phases. Initially, Numayri was close to the Sudanese communists and Arab socialists. During this time, he faced an open Ansar revolt (in 1970) and defeated it. Then, in the summer of 1971, communist officers attempted a coup and failed, and Numayri shifted his perspective. In 1972, he secured a settlement of the conflict in the south by recognizing southern regional autonomy. He followed a policy through the mid-1970s that has been described as a pragmatic approach to national integration and reconciliation. He had some success in this, but by the end of the 1970s began to shift to a more doctrinaire Islamic position, culminating in the September laws of 1983, which imposed his version of Islamic law on the Sudan. Conflict in the south had already been renewed, and this gave strength to southern opposition. The old Islamic-based political groups in the north, like the Ansar and the Khatmiyyah, opposed the September Laws. Opposition to Numayri grew rapidly and resulted in massive civilian demonstrations against him in the spring of 1985.

Numayri was overthrown by a group of senior military officers who pledged to restore civilian rule within a year. The Transitional Military Government (TMG) was led by General Suwar al-Dhahab, and they opened the way for major political campaigning in the northern Sudan. Conflict in the

south continued. The elections in the spring of 1986 confirmed the return of the old political organizations, although there were new groups that had significant strength. The civilian politics begun in the mid-1980s appeared to many to be a repeat of the experience from 1965-1969, and the results were similar. Economic problems grew, the civil war in the south increased in intensity, and political leadership in Khartoum seemed primarily occupied in political manipulations. It was in this context that the group of army officers lead by Umar al-Bashir took control on 30 June 1989.

The officers announced, "political wantonness has rendered the democratic experience a failure, destroyed national unity, and led to the sons of one people to carry arms against each other and to the continuation of the tragedy in the south."<sup>3</sup> This statement is similar to those issued by the officers in 1958 and 1969. The implication is clear. Civilian politicians have failed and the military is taking control to stop the damage caused by the civilian leaders.

There is, however, a clearly visible preference for civilian rule in the Sudan. Both the Abboud regime and the Numayri regime were brought down by civilian demonstrations. Abboud, during the events of 1964, seemed remarkably open to the idea of restoration of civilian control, and that was the whole purpose of the military regime led by Suwar al-Dhahab in 1985-1986. Even Numayri made a significant effort to give a civilian face to his regime through the organization of the Sudan Socialist Union, the later policy of national reconciliation with civilian politicians, and in the creation of regional governments at the beginning of the 1980s. Although the basic position of Umar al-Bashir is not clear on this, he has also made a significant effort to identify civilians with his regime.

Similarly, there seems to be, in the Sudan, a realization of the importance of honest elections in which the results reflect the views of the voters. During the Abboud and Numayri regimes, there were elections which took on the air of government-controlled referenda, but elections during periods of competitive party politics have been relatively fair. Even after a lapse of 18 years without competitive party politics during the Numayri era, there was active participation in the political process in 1985-1986.

In this context, the significant question is not "why did the military intervene?" Instead, it is, "Why did civilian party politics fail?" In the Sudanese context, in 1958, 1969, and 1989, the primary reason why the military acted to take control of the government, and received the support of the general population in doing so, was that the civilian politicians had failed to provide effective government for the Sudan. This adds a dimension to analyses of the reasons for the political role of the military in the Middle East and Africa.

Civilian politics had a firm foundation in the Sudan. There were leaders who had broad experience and awareness of democratic processes and voters who were willing to participate in elections which were not controlled by the state police. There were organized political parties which had strong institutional continuity and mass support. They were able to survive extended periods of military and anti-party rule with little impact on the loyalty of the party supporters.

Support for civilian politics was sufficiently strong that civilian groups were able to organize demonstrations which could bring an end to even a military government. In the 1960s, for example, the military government of Abboud was overthrown by civilian groups. The Sudan stood in sharp contrast to many other Middle Eastern countries of the time where once a parliamentary system had been overthrown, ineffective military rulers were replaced through coups led by other military groups. Elsewhere, military rule once established remained the basis for the political system, and civilianization, if it occurred, did so as a result of policies of the military rulers.

Part of the strength of civilian politics may lie in the association of modern style political party organization with already existing popular organizations. The leaderships of the Ansar and the Khatmiyyah were politically sophisticated, and their organizations made a relatively high level of political participation and mobilization possible.

This situation makes it difficult to apply some of the standard analyses to the Sudanese situation. Writing in the late 1960s, for example, Samuel P. Huntington wrote that in "countries like Pakistan and the Sudan, institutional evolution was unbalanced: the civil and military bureaucracies were more highly developed than the political parties, and

the military had strong incentives to move into the institutional vacuum...and to attempt to perform interest aggregation functions."<sup>4</sup> Writing at roughly the same time, another analyst wrote, "Democratic institutions in a largely illiterate plural society can hardly be expected to work effectively."<sup>5</sup> Yet, the effective survival of the northern mass parties for almost half a century, in the face of military regimes and social transformations, at least raises the question of whether or not the institutional development of party structures can be judged as significantly weaker than that of the civilian bureaucracy or the military.

The mass northern parties are, however, reflections of existing social groupings and are tied quite closely to those groups. In the 1960s, Sayyid Sadiq al-Mahdi made an effort to reshape the Ummah Party in a way that would reduce its identification with the Ansar. This caused a major split within the Ansar and the party, and the effort was dropped in the struggle for party survival after the military coup of 1969.

Similarly, a part of the Khatmiyyah-backed political organizations attempted in the 1950s to create a party not tied to a religious group. This effort was led by Ismail al-Azhari, who had been an ally of the Khatmiyyah, but when he became the first prime minister of the Sudan in 1953-1956, he attempted to free himself from Khatmiyyah control. For a time, his National Unionist Party (NUP) was separate from the explicitly Khatmiyyah-supported People's Democratic Party (PDP). However, by the end of the 1960s, these two parties had come back together as the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) with the head of the Khatmiyyah as the leader of the party.

Civilian politics in the Sudan were essentially sectarian politics. In the period of the emergence of party politics before independence, there were a number of people who attempted to create "non-sectarian" parties, but their efforts failed in the face of the mass support given the sectarian parties. This is the major institutional weakness of the mass parties. Both parties had great difficulty in expanding beyond the boundaries of the religious organizations which supported them. In addition, neither party would be able to be a truly national party because neither had any significant support in the southern third of the country. "National" coalitions would be possible, but these would require a high level of

cooperation between northern and southern parties, which was difficult to achieve.

In this context, to use the words of Huntington, the parties, however effectively institutionalized they might be, were unable to perform "interest aggregation functions" effectively. The military provided the most effective alternative to the divisive politics of sectarianism. There were other alternatives. In the 1950s, an effective Sudanese Communist Party (SCP) was set up and, by the 1960s, became one of the largest and best organized communist parties in Africa. It could not, however, compete in open elections with the mass support of the sectarian parties. Similarly, in the 1950s, an effective Islamic activist organization, the Sudanese Muslim Brotherhood (SMB) was also created, but in the contested elections of the 1950s and 1960s, it received almost no votes outside of the small groups of college and school graduates.

The continuing strength of the mass historic Muslim groups in the Sudan and their effective use of modern style political organization thus means that civilian politics are inevitably going to be influenced by sectarian issues. In the context of the sectarian struggle for position and power, civilian political leadership has been ineffective in resolving national issues in a way which reflects Sudanese national, as opposed to regional or sectarian, interests.

As national crises have converged, the military has appeared to be the only effective non-sectarian alternative. Even though individuals in military regimes could be identified as sympathetic to the Ansar or the Khatmiyyah, the Abboud, Numayri, and Suwar al-Dhahab regimes were able to maintain a position not identified with sectarian political organizations. This provided them with a basis for public support at those times when many Sudanese had become impatient with the chaos of sectarian politics.

The current military leadership of the Sudan is similarly not identified with one of the historic Muslim groups. In this it continues the "tradition" of the non-sectarian identity of a military regime. It does not, however, have the advantage of apparent neutrality that the other military regimes had when they assumed control of the government. The regime of Umar al-Bashir is identified by many as being associated with the National Islamic Front

(NIF), the political organization of the Muslim Brotherhood.

The importance of this identification reflects an important change in the "Islamic politics" of the Sudan by the end of the 1980s. Muslim "fundamentalists" had little effective power outside of the college campuses until the late 1970s. At that time, a growing proportion of northern Sudanese began to be involved in a reaffirmation of the importance of Islam in their lives and society. This is part of the broader development which has been called by many the "resurgence of Islam" and is not limited to the Sudan. While many reaffirming Muslims did not join the Brotherhood, they sympathized with its goals of establishing an explicitly Islamic constitution and effective implementation of Islamic law in Sudanese society.

This reaffirmation took a distinctive form when Numayri imposed the "September Laws" in 1983. His version of Islamic Law was not accepted by the traditional Muslim leaders. Although Numayri was influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood, the September Laws did not fully reflect their program either. When Numayri was overthrown in 1985, virtually everyone agreed on the need to repeal, abrogate, or significantly amend the September Laws.

As civilian, sectarian politics began to operate again, however, none of the major parties felt that it would be politically safe to be seen "de-Islamizing" the Sudanese state. As a result, Sadiq al-Mahdi, who had been imprisoned in 1983 for his opposition to the September Laws, did not take steps when he was prime minister to repeal Numayri's laws. One of the major reasons for this was the potential opposition of the Muslim Brotherhood. This group has become a major political force in the northern Sudan. In the 1986 elections, its candidates received almost 20 percent of the votes in the northern provinces, and the NIF became a major force in parliament.

In this context, the current rulers may be non-sectarian in that they are not identified with either the Ansar or the Khatmiyyah, but they are identified by many with a major new-style Muslim organization, and in this may represent a "new sectarianism" in Sudanese politics. This may account for the fact that while all of the other military regimes had a reasonable "honeymoon period" in which there was popular support for new military regimes, little or

no such honeymoon period existed for al-Bashir and his colleagues. Bashir's regime must overcome this identification with a particular group if it is to have any success in resolving major political issues in the Sudan.

The military has played an important role in the Sudan because civilian-sectarian politics have not provided a sufficient basis for national consensus. Even within the context of northern-dominated Sudanese politics, the Muslim-based civilian parties could not provide a sense of northern-based national unity. In 1958, 1969, and 1989, the sectarian parties had become so involved in the political struggle for influence that they were unable to take national policy initiatives. As a result, the military intervened in those years to bring order to politics in the capital.

Military involvement in politics is thus related to the cycle of sectarian/non-sectarian politics. The current regime possibly represents a new stage in this development by its identification with a new Islamic tendency rather than the old sectarian groups. It is difficult to predict the future, but if the new identification of a military junta means the military has become another arena of competition for religious allegiance, then the Sudan may be facing a series of military coups similar to that which Syria experienced when the ideological partisanship of the Ba'th Party spread to the military in the 1960s. If, in contrast, the current regime can rise above identification with a specific ideological tendency, it could fulfill the hope that the Sudanese have always had that some group would be able to rise above sectarian interests and create a national government. The prospects of this latter happening are, unfortunately, very limited.

### **National Unity and Civil War**

The current crisis of governance in the Sudan involves both the heritage of regional and local divisions and the longstanding search for political organizations with national rather than sectarian or regional identities. The instability is more than simply an interregional conflict between northern Arab Muslims and southern Sudanese. The "civil war" is in many ways the violent manifestation of the struggle to create and control the national identity of the Sudan.

There are two important new elements in the Sudanese political scene of the 1980s and 1990s. One is the emergence of the Muslim Brotherhood (and Islamic revivalists in general) as a significant popular political force which transcends the old-style sectarianism of northern politics. The other element is the development of an effective organization which may be primarily southern-based but attempts to transcend southern regional interests, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM).

The SPLM emerged in the early 1980s following the renewal of fighting in the southern region against the central government. From 1955 until 1972, there had been a civil war in the southern regions which basically reflected the struggle of the southern Sudanese for an equitable place in the Sudanese political system. Some advocated secession, but most wanted some form of autonomy for the south or the creation of a federal system. The conflict in those years was basically a conflict between southerners and a northern-dominated central government. This phase of the conflict came to an end with the Addis Ababa Agreement of 1972 which granted special autonomy to the southern region. The organization which had effectively unified the southern opposition was led by Joseph Lagu, whose forces were integrated into Numayri's regime and who played an important political role in Khartoum during the 1970s.

In 1980-1981, Numayri attempted to restructure the southern government and violated the 1972 Agreement. Fighting broke out in parts of the south, and opposition rapidly intensified after the passage of the September Laws in 1983 which applied Islamic Law to Muslims and non-Muslims alike. In this context, a coalition of opposition forces centered in the south emerged under the leadership of John Garang as the Sudan People's Liberation Movement.

The SPLM cooperated with other anti-Numayri forces but remained separate from them. Garang and his associates worked to create a new ideology and program aiming at a fundamental transformation of the Sudan. The SPLM claimed to be a liberation movement for all of the Sudan, not just the south, and it attempted to appeal to non-Arab groups and non-sectarian Arabs in the north as well.

Believing that the Transitional Military Government of 1985-1986 and the subsequent civilian

regime were simply a continuation of old, ineffective and oppressive institutions, Garang did not participate in the transition or the elections of 1986. Garang and the new prime minister in 1986, Sadiq al-Mahdi, were unable to agree, and fighting continued in many areas of the south between Garang's forces and the Sudanese army. Sadiq's inability either to defeat or agree with Garang was a significant element in his overthrow in the summer of 1989.

The SPLM represents a major challenge to leaders in Khartoum because it calls for something more than simply a restoration or revision of the 1972 agreement. Mansour Khalid, a former foreign minister under Numayri and now part of the SPLM, says that the SPLM "drove people to look inward and identify what makes Sudanese of them all rather than look at the Sudan from without, the way Arabs, Africans and Muslims think it is or would like it to be.... It called for devising new political structures and institutions rather than repeating experiences that have outlived their usefulness -- if they ever were useful."<sup>6</sup>

The SPLM has adopted a strongly secularist position, which means opposition to any official recognition of Islamic law and to any political party which has a sectarian rather than a secular base. Garang's current program for peace involves four points: 1) a government of national unity to be formed by the two fighting armies and "nonsectarian political parties that believe in democracy, and the trade union alliance;" 2) a new national army integrating the two armies now fighting each other; 3) convening a national constitutional conference; and, 4) holding free general elections to ratify the draft constitution and elect a national assembly.<sup>7</sup>

In its programs and goals, the SPLM is a major anti-sectarian political force. Its weakness as a proponent of secularism is its primary base of power is in the southern, non-Muslim region where sectarian parties have little influence. The SPLM has had little appeal among the members of the former sectarian parties and by its strong statements about excluding all religion from politics has antagonized other northerners who are not supporters of sectarian politics. In this way, despite its goals, the SPLM has not yet been able to break out of its own regional identity and become a truly national party.

The two new political forces of the 1980s thus also have limitations on their ability to act as "national" parties. The Islamic "fundamentalism" of the Muslim Brotherhood has no appeal to non-Muslim Sudanese, while the SPLM lacks appeal among Muslims because its vigorous opposition to recognition of Islamic law makes it sound anti-Islamic to many Sudanese Muslims. To the extent that the Bashir regime is identified with Islamic fundamentalism, the limitations on the Brotherhood apply to the appeal of the current regime as well.

As a result, the change of regime in Khartoum this past summer has not, as of December 1989, meant any significant change in the prospects for peace. The alternatives are presented in stark, almost holy war terms by both sides. In SPLM presentations, for example, the SPLM "stands for a new, united, democratic Sudan of justice, human dignity, and equality for all Sudanese irrespective of race, religion, or sex," while the new military junta represents "the old Sudan of military dictatorship, racism, religious fundamentalism, and separatism."<sup>8</sup> Similar critiques of the SPLM by central government figures emphasize the emotional gap that continues to exist between the two sides.

At the moment, the two major forces involved in the Sudan are both opposed to the old structures of politics as represented by the traditional sectarian parties. Both face the problems of creating a means of mobilizing large numbers of Sudanese without providing a basis for the return of the old sectarian powers. The lesson of the transitions of 1964-1965 and 1985-1986 is that even though major revolutions may be created by the non-sectarian forces, in basically fair elections, the old sectarian organizations continue to have the power to mobilize large numbers of their followers in the electoral political scene. The paradox of the SPLM program, for example, is a truly democratic election which would reflect the wishes of the majority of the Sudanese would reject the secularism on which the SPLM insists.

The danger at the present time is the old sectarianism of the Ansar and the Khatmiyyah may be replaced by the more violent "new sectarianism" of Muslim fundamentalists and secularist ideologues. The recent breakdown of the discussions mediated by President Jimmy Carter reflect the difficulties of trying to find ground for compromise when both

sides seem to be strongly committed to their specific positions and programs.

### Conclusions

The historic diversity of peoples within the Sudan reflects strongly held regional and religious identities. These are not easily ignored and are often the basis for conflict. The continuing political instability of the Sudan reflects this lack of a national consensus.

Until organizations emerge that have a truly national appeal, the best that can be hoped for is a bargained compromise. Such compromise has in the past provided some respite from conflict. Immediately following independence, there was a possibility of interregional cooperation based on the concept of a federal Sudan, but that opportunity was squandered in the political maneuverings of the first parliamentary era. There was a national roundtable conference in 1965 whose conclusions suffered a similar fate in the partisan struggles of 1965-1969. The 1972 Agreement represented a major achievement, but it was ultimately undermined by the ambitions and autocratic methods of Numayri.

Unfortunately, at the moment, Bashir and Garang appear to be representatives of a new sectarianism rather than creators of compromise. Under current circumstances, neither seems able to mobilize sufficient force to defeat the other, and neither has the resources to provide a basis for a truly national appeal. As a result, the only basis for optimism seems to be the simple hope that since the Sudanese have been able to survive the tribulations of the past years, they should be able to continue to survive the current troubles as well, despite their growing magnitude.

The danger, however, is that the problems are now not solvable. This discussion has not even mentioned the problems of the Sudanese debt, the destruction of housing and farmland in recent years as a result of natural and human-made catastrophes, and the high proportion of the population that has become refugees. These are the almost surrealistic dimensions of a society near collapse.

Instead, this discussion has focused on the mechanics of politics. These represent the foundation on which any solution of other problems must rest. Without effective leadership or a national sense of identity, the people of the different regions

have little concern for high loss of life or social destruction outside of their own locality. As the military forces of both government and opposition become committed to a new ideological sectarianism, the Sudan faces the prospect of continued destructive conflict.

In the Sudan, civilian government and military government have failed. The current regime runs the risk of simply continuing the cycle of the past, and in this it is aided by the intransigence of the opposition. It is not that the Sudan is without visions of an appropriate future. People like Francis Deng have long provided ideas which could be the basis for a new Sudan that could be an example for the world.<sup>9</sup> However, achieving this new Sudan will require a high level of visionary commitment among leaders and followers alike in the Sudan. At the moment, the commitment does not seem to be there.

In this situation, rather than being a productive "breadbasket," the Sudan will probably continue to be a "basket case" in both political and economic terms.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>John Obert Voll and Sarah Potts Voll, *The Sudan: Unity and Diversity in a Multicultural State* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1985), 6. Chapter one of this book provides an introduction to the complex diversity of the modern Sudan.

<sup>2</sup>The standard analysis of the Mahdist movement is P. M. Holt, *The Mahdist State in the Sudan, 1881-1898* 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970).

<sup>3</sup>Foreign Broadcast Information Service, *FBIS Near East and South Asia Daily Report*, 30 June 1989. (FBIS-NES-89-125; 11.)

<sup>4</sup>Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 85.

<sup>5</sup>J. C. Hurewitz, *Middle East Politics: The Military Dimension* (New York: Frederick Praeger, 1969), 163.

<sup>6</sup>Mansour Khalid, "Preface," in *John Garang Speaks*, John Garang, Mansour Khalid, ed. (London: KPI, 1987), xi. The speeches and essays in this book provide an important introduction to the ideas and programs of the SPLM.

<sup>7</sup>Radio of the Sudanese People's Liberation Army, (30 September 1989). Translation by the Foreign Broadcast Information Service. *FBIS Daily Near East and South Asia Daily Report*, 04 October 1989. (FBIS-NES-89-191; 16.)

<sup>8</sup>Sudanese People's Liberation Army, 30 September 1989.

<sup>9</sup>See, for example, the practical vision presented in Francis Mading Deng, *Seed of Redemption, A Political Novel* (New York: Lilian Barber, 1986).



# Ethiopia and the Dynamics of Interstate Relations on the Horn of Africa

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The modern state of Ethiopia is a regional hegemon whose foreign policy in the Horn of Africa is primarily concerned with maintaining its territorial integrity. Ethiopia's relations with its immediate neighbors Kenya, Sudan, and Somalia as well as with countries in Northern Africa and the Middle East largely relate to border issues (e.g. Eritrea, the Ogaden, the SPLA). Consequently, by focusing on Ethiopia's foreign policy in the Horn and its environs, we might glean insights into the politics of the region as a whole. The present essay attempts to understand the interrelations between and among the states of the region by concentrating on how successive Ethiopian regimes have historically attempted to preserve the state's territorial integrity.

The foreign relations of the modern Ethiopian state have been characterized by a consistent quest on the part of the government to establish the legitimacy of this multi-ethnic polity as a viable nation-state and to maintain its territorial integrity. In many respects, then, the foreign policies pursued by the emperors of imperial Ethiopia were fundamentally not very different from the foreign policy strategies followed by the leaders of Afro-Marxist Ethiopia. What has changed from one era to the next has been the public manifestations of Ethiopia's foreign policy. Whereas the regime of Emperor Haile Selassie relied heavily upon the United States as a superpower patron, President Mengistu Haile Mariam cast the fate of his regime with the Soviet Union. Both governments utilized economic and military aid from their respective superpower patrons to augment their own meager material resources, thus en-

hancing the ability of the regime to pursue not only certain foreign policy objectives but also specific domestic policies. Rather than being a pawn of one superpower or another, a careful analysis of Ethiopia's foreign policy suggests that Ethiopia's leaders have consistently placed their perceptions of what was best for Ethiopia before all else.<sup>1</sup>

## **Diplomacy and State Building in Imperial Ethiopia**

The modern Ethiopian state did not emerge until the middle of the nineteenth century. At that time, Ras (King) Kasa, who traced his lineage to the House of David and King Solomon, succeeded in consolidating his rule over the Abyssinian core from which modern Ethiopia would grow. The establishment of this link to the House of David was important because legend held that this was a requirement for anyone who claimed a place as the rightful King of Kings among the Abyssinians (Ethiopians). Kasa's ascension to power came on the heels of almost 100 years of internecine conflict among the nobility in the region. Local warlords and traditional nobility competed for power and in the process fragmented the ancient state into a number of mini-kingdoms. By 1855, Ras Kasa remained the only nobleman with the popular support and military capacity necessary to begin the process of state reconstruction.<sup>2</sup>

On being crowned emperor, Kasa took the name of Tewodros II. During his brief reign, Tewodros was consumed with establishing control over the peripheral parts of his fragile empire and with territorial integrity. He wanted to create a united Ethiopia, but never quite succeeded. Tewodros was persistently confronted by rebellion in the periphery, and, although he managed to modernize and centralize his army to a degree, he was never powerful enough to feel secure.<sup>3</sup>

Tewodros was the first modern leader of Ethiopia who tried to develop a foreign policy that transcended the Horn region. His goal appeared to have been to have his regime recognized on an equal footing with the great powers of Europe. Tewodros appealed specifically to Great Britain, France, and Russia, as fellow Christian nations, to assist him in his fight against the Turks, Egyptians, and other Muslim enemies. In no case, however, was Tewodros' request heeded to his satisfaction. In fact, he was incensed at the apparent lack of respect accorded him by Emperor Napoleon II and Queen Victoria.<sup>4</sup>

In a fit of desperation in 1865, Tewodros resorted to force in his efforts to gain British recognition of Ethiopia as an equal nation state and to exchange diplomatic representation. Tewodros took hostage several British subjects who had come to his court on behalf of their government, including the British consul assigned to Ethiopia. At first, Britain tried to negotiate release of the hostages, but it refused to accede to Tewodros' demands for reciprocal relations. Two years later, a British military expedition moved from Eritrea into the highland core of Ethiopia and attacked Tewodros' capital at Magdala. Tewodros' troops were outmatched and surrendered. Rather than submit, Tewodros chose suicide. The British troops withdrew after securing the release of the hostages, and, after a brief power struggle, another king named Kasa ascended to the imperial throne and chose the name Yohannes IV.<sup>5</sup>

Yohannes' most outstanding accomplishments were in the field of foreign policy. Whereas Tewodros had attempted to demand respect and recognition of Ethiopia by European powers, Yohannes followed a course of patient diplomacy. The late nineteenth century was a time of heightened European interest in Africa as a base for colonial expansion. It was also a period when Sudanese Mahdists challenged Ethiopia on its western border. Yohannes feared European expansionism more than he did the spread of Islam into his domain. At one point, Yohannes even made an abortive attempt to form an alliance with the Mahdists against a potential European incursion. His worst fears were confirmed in 1885 when Britain, which occupied parts of Eritrea at the time, allowed Italy to take control of the port of Massawa and to expand its presence in the area. From this point on, it was clear that Italy

coveted Ethiopia itself. However, Yohannes was killed in battle against the Mahdists before he could force the hand of the Italians.<sup>6</sup>

The most serious challenge to Yohannes' claim to the imperial throne was posed by Ras Menelik II of Shoa. As insurance against the possible invasion of his domain by Yohannes, Menelik entered into a pact with the Italians in the small town of Wichale in Wollo Province. The accord was officially titled, "The Wichale Treaty of Perpetual Peace and Friendship." It was written in both an Amharic and an Italian version. The treaty, among other things, recognized Menelik and not Yohannes as the true emperor of all of Ethiopia. Under the terms of the treaty, Italian claims to Massawa were recognized as long as Ethiopia could use the port freely for trade. Menelik also agreed to cede part of the Tigre highlands to Italy and to give it certain commercial, industrial, and judicial privileges in Eritrea. For its part, Italy agreed to give Ethiopia a substantial loan and to continue to supply Menelik with arms.<sup>7</sup> The Italian and Amharic versions of the Treaty of Wichale were identical except for one article, Article XVII. The Italian version of this article essentially implied that Ethiopia was a protectorate of Italy. The Amharic version suggested that Ethiopia was free to seek the assistance of the Italians in the conduct of its foreign policy, but it was not obligated in any way to do so. When Menelik realized the discrepancy in the two documents, he attempted to negotiate the matter with the Italians but was unsuccessful. In 1893, the emperor announced that he was exercising his right to abrogate the treaty.<sup>8</sup>

The abrogation of the Treaty of Wichale soon led to war. Menelik was prepared for the possibility that Italy might attempt to seize the whole of Ethiopia. In anticipation, he strengthened his defensive capabilities by purchasing more modern arms and military equipment from private dealers as well as from such governments as Russia, France, and Great Britain. Menelik already possessed a formidable array of modern weapons which had enabled him to expand his territorial possession to the north and south even before the death of Yohannes. The emperor secured the military support he needed by calling upon his subjects as was customary, emphasizing the historic reputation of Ethiopia for resisting the armed incursion of would-be conquerors.<sup>9</sup>

The Italians began the systematic penetration of the Ethiopian highland in early 1895. Minor skirmishes between Italian forces and Ethiopian regional armies in the north took place throughout that year. However, in January of the following year, Menelik decided that the time had come for a decisive showdown. An Ethiopian force of about 100,000, consisting of Menelik's personal army and a number of units under the command of regional nobility loyal to him, confronted an Italian contingent of 20,000 well-armed troops at Adowa in late February 1896. After six days of intense fighting, the Italians were resoundingly defeated, suffering enormous casualties. More than 35 percent of the Italian troops were killed in battle.<sup>10</sup>

The Ethiopian victory at Adowa effectively preserved the independence of that country from European colonialism. The vanquished Italians sued for peace, and a treaty was signed that allowed Italy to keep Eritrea while renouncing all claims to the Ethiopian core. Shortly after this, Britain, France, and Russia also signed treaties with Ethiopia and established normal diplomatic relations. These agreements provided an atmosphere in which Menelik could establish the juridically defined boundaries of the modern Ethiopian state. By the turn of the twentieth century, Ethiopia's current boundaries (except for the western border) had been set, at least on paper. In effect, Menelik was free to become an active participant in the colonial partition of Africa along with the European powers. The emperor's diplomatic acumen contributed greatly to the almost mythical image of Ethiopia as the epitome of African independence.<sup>11</sup>

Menelik died in 1913, and it was not until 1930 that the next strong emperor, Haile Selassie I, assumed the throne. Haile Selassie quickly demonstrated that he was committed to the creation of a stronger, more modern bureaucratic empire with unquestioned respect in the world community. As early as 1923, while he served as Crown Regent, this was apparent. At that time Haile Selassie was responsible for negotiating Ethiopia's acceptance into the League of Nations.<sup>12</sup>

The Italian Fascist occupation of Ethiopia between 1936 and 1941 briefly halted Haile Selassie's efforts. However, when he regained the throne in 1941, he began again to work toward improving Ethiopia's international standing. He apparently

felt that this was the only sure way to protect that country's independence. The emperor had thought that by joining the League of Nations, Ethiopia would protect itself from the colonial designs of member states like Italy. However, this proved not to be the case. While in exile in London during the Italian occupation of his country, Haile Selassie went to Geneva to make an impassioned plea before the General Assembly of the League of Nations for aid in defense of Ethiopia. Although the League charter stipulated that all members were committed to protect the sovereignty of one another, the league ignored Haile Selassie's appeal.<sup>13</sup>

Despite his disappointment with the League of Nations, Haile Selassie continued to value diplomacy as an instrument for pursuing both foreign and domestic policies. Following World War II, this orientation resulted in the emperor developing relations with a powerful foreign patron, the United States.<sup>14</sup>

Ethiopia was liberated from Italian Fascist rule with the assistance of British Commonwealth forces, and the British stayed on to help Haile Selassie reconstruct his public bureaucracy. Despite readily accepting British military, economic, and technical assistance, the emperor feared that Britain might declare Ethiopia a protectorate or use the claim that the whole of Italian East Africa (Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Somalia) was occupied enemy territory and thus could be partitioned for administrative convenience. It was this fear that prompted Haile Selassie to cultivate an alternative patron-client relationship with the United States.<sup>15</sup>

For the effective use of diplomacy, Haile Selassie was able to regain complete administrative control over his domain (and more) by 1954. A 1952 resolution of the United Nations made possible the federation of Ethiopia and Eritrea. Eritrea was accorded regional autonomy within the federation, but Haile Selassie was bent on unifying the two territories. For a decade he worked to undermine the federation and create the conditions which led to its dissolution in 1962 and the full incorporation of Eritrea into the Ethiopian Empire.<sup>16</sup>

### **Imperial Ethiopia and the United States**

Haile Selassie was able to affect this change through diplomatic maneuvering at the United Nations with the support of its new superpower patron,

the United States. British military aid to Ethiopia was curtailed in 1952, the year before Ethiopia signed a security agreement with the United States. Since the early 1940s, the United States had wanted a military base in Eritrea that could be used as a radio tracking station to monitor activities in the Soviet Bloc. Haile Selassie considered the US a desirable patron not only because of military and economic strength, but also because he considered the Americans as less threatening to Ethiopia's independence. Two agreements were concluded in May 1953 to formalize this new relationship. Consequently, the United States guaranteed Ethiopia's security, and, in the process, the emperor's efforts to consolidate his rule domestically were greatly enhanced.<sup>17</sup>

In addition to the military aid Ethiopia received from the United States over the next 23 years, its armed forces also benefited from the presence of a Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG), established in 1954. This unit provided training for the Ethiopian army down to the battalion level. By 1975, the total US military assistance to Ethiopia amounted to almost \$280 million. In addition, between 1953 and 1976, 3,978 Ethiopian soldiers, more than half the total for all of Africa, were trained in the United States.<sup>18</sup>

The relationship that developed between Ethiopia and the United States in the immediate post-war period could best be described as mutual dependence. In the days prior to advances in satellite technology, the Kagnew Naval Air Station in Eritrea provided the Americans with a valuable link in their worldwide military communications network. At the time, American policymakers considered it essential to keep Haile Selassie in power if access to this base was to be maintained. In this sense, the strategic interest of the United States came to intersect with Haile Selassie's domestic and regional interests. The emperor wanted to consolidate his hold over Eritrea and have access to military resources sufficient to ensure the preservation of Ethiopia's territorial integrity.<sup>19</sup>

Even though the US preferred not to become involved in Ethiopia's domestic affairs, on several occasions it was drawn in to such matters in order to bolster the Haile Selassie regime. For the most part, however, the United States was able to stay out of direct involvement in Ethiopia's domestic politics.

Its assistance consisted largely of helping the Ethiopian government develop its military capabilities as a hedge against a Somali threat. The Americans also provided counterinsurgency training and on-the-ground advisers to help Ethiopia suppress Eritrean nationalism.<sup>20</sup>

In addition to cultivating a military alliance with the United States in order to consolidate his control over the country after World War II, Haile Selassie effectively utilized international diplomacy to establish Ethiopia as a valued member of the world community of free and independent states. Under his leadership, Ethiopia became an active member of the United Nations, even going so far as to send Ethiopian troops to fight under the UN flag in Korea in 1951 and to the Congo (Zaire) in 1961. Haile Selassie tried to project the image of a staunch foe of communism and a loyal ally to the Western Alliance, of which its patron, the United States, was the leader.<sup>21</sup>

### **Imperial Ethiopia and Africa**

Despite presiding over one of two African countries to have escaped European colonialism, Haile Selassie did not attempt to claim the mantle of "Champion of African Independence" until the late 1950s. Until 1958, the emperor had been silent on the issue of European colonialism in Africa. But in April of that year, at the first meeting of the Conference of Independent African States in Accra, Ghana, Haile Selassie took the lead in pressing for a resolution establishing the territorial integrity of what were then the independent states of Africa. In the process, he effectively muted the prospect that Ethiopia would be vilified as an African imperialist for its role in the partition of Africa during the European "scramble" for Africa. Over the years, Haile Selassie developed the reputation of a sage voice of moderation on a continent filled with nationalists militantly calling for radical decolonization. It was in this capacity that he offered to host the Headquarters of the Organization of African Unity when it was founded in the early 1960s, once again demonstrating his diplomatic acumen.<sup>22</sup>

### **The Foreign Policy of Afro-Marxist Ethiopia**

The foreign policy of Ethiopia did not immediately change with the demise of the imperial regime.

Initially, the country's new leaders maintained the general thrust of the foreign policies developed under Haile Selassie and concentrated mainly on consolidating their rule. The Derg liberalized politics, enabling civilian political organization to engage in open political expression more freely than ever before. In addition, it assigned a high priority to a resolution of the Eritrean question. At first, diplomacy was tried, but this approach was soon abandoned, and, by 1975, the regime seemed committed to a military solution. The Eritrean nationalists claimed that because the Ethiopians had not allowed federation to work, their cause represented a case of self-determination denied. Rather than trace their association with the Ethiopian state to antiquity as did the advocates of unity, the Eritrean nationalists linked the emergence of the multi-ethnic Eritrean state to the Italian colonial period.<sup>23</sup>

By the mid-1970s, Kagnew Station had largely lost its initial value for the United States. Advances in satellite technology had rendered land-based communications facilities of this kind less important for long-range surveillance. Yet, the United States felt the need to maintain a presence in this strategically important part of Africa, particularly since the Soviet Union was beginning to expand into the area. The administration of President Gerald Ford wanted to avoid an embarrassment similar to what had been experienced by the United States in Angola in 1974, when covert US aid to anti-communist combatants failed to dislodge the pro-Moscow Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola. Even though Ford and Secretary of State Kissinger were uneasy over Ethiopia's violations of human rights and increasingly leftist tendencies, they only cautiously tried to encourage the Derg to moderate its human rights policies.<sup>24</sup>

The United States first began to express concern about the human rights violations of the new regime in November 1974 when 60 political prisoners who had served in the old regime were executed. This concern was heightened two months later when the Derg mobilized a force comprised of regular military units and a hastily assembled people's militia in an effort to suppress the Eritrean insurgency. By June 1975, the government had ap-

proximately 40,000 troops poised in the Eritrean region, ready to launch an all-out offensive against Eritrean guerrillas. Instead, the Eritrean forces attacked first, surprising and decimating the Ethiopians in their base camps.<sup>25</sup>

Whereas the administration of President Ford had been reluctant to impose sanctions on Ethiopia because of its human rights record, in the 1976 American presidential campaign, Democratic candidate Jimmy Carter made human rights a centerpiece of his party's platform. When he assumed office, Carter moved swiftly to make good on his word. On 25 February 1977, he announced that because of continued human rights violations, certain governments, including Ethiopia, that were the beneficiaries of US military aid, would have such aid reduced the following fiscal year.<sup>26</sup>

By this time, the Ethiopian government was heavily dependent on the military assistance provided by its superpower patron. It was clear that given the mounting civil unrest inside Ethiopia, in Eritrea, and along the Somali border, an interruption of foreign military assistance could lead not only to the collapse of the regime, but also possibly to the dismantlement of the Ethiopian state itself. Consequently, the Derg began to cast about for alternative sources of foreign military assistance. Among the countries Ethiopia turned to were the People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union. At first the actual assistance provided by either of these superpowers was minimal, and the United States still maintained its presence in the country. However, by the spring of 1977, this all began to change.<sup>27</sup>

By April 1977, relations between the US and Ethiopia had deteriorated to the point that the Derg decided to oust the Americans from the country. The leading figure in the Provisional Military Administrative Council (PMAC), Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam, demanded that the Americans close down Kagnew, all MAAG operations, and most other US installations within 72 hours. Only a small staff was allowed at the US Embassy. By then, the first supplies of Soviet military hardware had begun to arrive, and there were signs that the USSR would be the superpower patron chosen by the Derg to replace the US.<sup>28</sup>

### **Afro-Marxist Ethiopia, the USSR, and the Eastern Bloc**

Apparently sensing that the regime was in desperate trouble, internal and external enemies began to take action in hopes of hastening its demise. Leftist opposition groups began to wage urban guerilla campaigns intended to demoralize and discredit the Derg, and Somalia committed regular troops to assist ethnic Somali in the Ogaden region in their efforts to break away from Ethiopia. Simultaneously, the Somali government expressed concern over the growing Soviet and Cuban presence in Ethiopia. Until then, Somalia had been a client of the Soviet Union. After regular Somali troops participated in the invasion of the Ogaden in June 1977, the Soviets began to withdraw their large staff of military advisers from Somalia. In November, Somalia announced it had abrogated the 1974 Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with the Soviet Union. In addition, diplomatic relations with Cuba were suspended. From this point on, the Soviets wholeheartedly adopted Ethiopia as their main client in the Horn region. In late November, they launched a massive air and sea lift of arms and other military equipment to Ethiopia. Over the next several months, more than 11,000 Cubans and 1,000 Soviet military personnel arrived in the country and were sent to the Ogaden front. This aid was decisive in turning the tide in favor of Ethiopia by early 1978.<sup>29</sup>

Having been ousted from Ethiopia, and with tensions mounting in the Middle East and Iran, the United States began to cultivate alliances in Northeast Africa which could facilitate the development of a long range military strike capability to penetrate expeditiously into these troubled areas. These developments coincided with an escalation of tensions in the Horn region in general. For example, beginning in May, clashes occurred between Ethiopia and Sudan on their border, and Egypt committed troops to help guard the eastern border of Sudan. The United States eventually began to pursue systematically what amounted to an encirclement strategy intended to isolate Ethiopia by entering into military relations with its neighbors. Countries such as Egypt, Sudan, Kenya, Somalia, and Oman were asked by the US to allow their territories to be used as staging grounds for the emerging Rapid Deployment Force (RDF). Soviet

clients in the region such as Ethiopia, Libya, and South Yemen perceived this to be a threat and formed a loose alliance, pledging to jointly repulse any effort by the US or its proxies in the region to intervene in their respective countries.<sup>30</sup>

As did the regime of Haile Selassie, Ethiopia's current Afro-Marxist regime has accorded its international image and territorial integrity the highest priority in its foreign policy. Domestically, its approach to foreign policy has resulted in the growing regimentation and militarization of society. Opposition groups have forced the regime to rely extensively on the Soviet Union to maintain itself in power and to preserve the country's territorial integrity. Over the 12 years beginning in 1977, Soviet military assistance to Ethiopia was estimated to be as much as \$11 billion. However, by 1987 there was clear evidence that the Soviets had decided to drastically scale back their military assistance to Ethiopia and to press for political solutions to that country's several civil conflicts. By that time, there were fewer than 1,800 Soviet advisers in Ethiopia, and about 2,000 advisers combined from Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, East Germany, and Poland. The Cuban military presence in Ethiopia had dropped to less than 2,000.<sup>31</sup>

Although President Mengistu himself eschewed any talk of Ethiopian-style glasnost, Ethiopia, like many Soviet client states, could not escape the global impact of Gorbachev's reforms. By late 1989, Ethiopia was witnessing not only a lessening in Soviet support, but also allies such as East Germany and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen were involved in their own version of glasnost as the Communist parties of both countries surrendered to pressures for political liberalization and democratization. In addition, all Cuban military personnel stationed in garrisons in the Ogaden were withdrawn.<sup>32</sup>

Although Ethiopia has recently been heavily dependent upon the Soviet Union for military assistance, Soviet influence has not been such that it has been able to orchestrate the policy choices of the regime. Although the Afro-Marxist regime consistently sides with the Russians in the international diplomatic arena, it has on numerous occasions demonstrated its independence in the area of domestic policy and international economic policy. For instance, the PMAC took its time in setting up a

vanguard party in spite of steady Soviet pressure to do so. When the party was formed, it was dominated by former military personnel, again contrary to Soviet wishes. In economic policy, Ethiopia has close aid and trade relations with the West and pursues a pragmatic investment policy. On a state visit to the Soviet Union in 1988, President Mengistu is said to have been told by President Mikhail Gorbachev that if Soviet support were to continue, the USSR would have to see dramatic changes in Ethiopia's agricultural priorities, coupled with political liberalization. The Soviet President denounced the policies of the Brezhnev years and refused to continue the unqualified military and economic support of the Mengistu regime. It seems that a combination of economic realities and Soviet pressure encouraged the Mengistu regime in 1989 to at least partially retreat from its dogmatically statist approach to economic development.<sup>33</sup>

The only leverage the USSR seems to have had on Ethiopia over the past decade has been military aid. Economic aid was not as significant. Trade relations between the Soviet Bloc and Ethiopia over this period were dramatically stepped up but could not compare with the trade relations between Ethiopia and Western Bloc countries such as the United States and Italy. Before 1974, the total volume of trade with Eastern block countries never exceeded 4.5 percent. By 1982, 17 percent of Ethiopia's exports went to other socialist countries. In addition, its socialist friends such as Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Poland, Romania, Hungary, North Korea, Cuba, and South Yemen provided technical and/or economic support to Ethiopia. The types of development aid covered in bilateral agreements with socialist countries ranged from factories and assembly plants to geological surveys; from doctors and teachers to construction engineers. However, most of this aid was in the form of loans with terms very close to commercial rates. Even if the Soviets and their allies were interested in providing Ethiopia with more economic aid, it was unlikely that they could, since they did not possess the foreign exchange to be too generous, nor the regular food supplies that could be used to address the problems caused by drought and famine in Ethiopia.<sup>34</sup>

### **Afro-Marxist Ethiopia and the West**

Ethiopia remains heavily dependent upon the Soviet Bloc for military aid, but it cannot do without the West for economic development and relief aid. The European Economic Community (EEC) is Ethiopia's most significant source of foreign aid. In 1980-81, Western sources accounted for more than 90 percent of Ethiopia's foreign aid; most of this came from the EEC. Since then, Eastern bloc countries have come to account for a larger share of Ethiopia's aid (about 20 percent), and other multi-lateral and bilateral donors have also begun to provide more aid. The World Bank, for example, after having refrained from giving aid to Ethiopia between 1975 and 1981, pledged over \$250 million in project aid. The European Development Fund promised about \$300 million, and the IMF agreed to a loan of almost \$100 million. The regime took this IMF loan even though it claimed to disagree with IMF policies. These are but a few examples of the aid agreements that were concluded with Western donors and lenders. A recent joint venture law and a new foreign investment policy have stimulated a gradual return of private investors, although the level of such investments remains low.<sup>35</sup>

Ethiopia, then, is heavily dependent on Western economic aid, from project aid to loans, grants, and even humanitarian aid. At the same time, no Western donor is able to influence day-to-day economic policy on a regular basis. For instance, the Swedish International Development Agency, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the World Bank, and other donor agencies have historically favored the development of agricultural cooperatives organized on the principles of a free market. The Ethiopian regime, however, has attempted to develop cooperatives that will be transformed into socialist collectives and are an integral part of a centrally planned and directed economy. As a matter of policy, the World Bank and other foreign aid agencies eschew a heavy-handed approach to influencing a country in determining economic strategy. Bilateral donors from West and East may have influence when they operate in policy-making bodies at the request of the Ethiopian government, but this does not necessarily indicate a controlling influence. Like the imperial regime before it, the new government has attempted to play donors against one another and thereby max-

imize certain benefits without surrendering sovereignty.<sup>36</sup>

By 1988, Ethiopia's Afro-Marxist regime was faced with enormous economic and military problems and with the growing weariness of the Soviet Union to provide support. This situation forced President Mengistu to attempt to improve relations with Western countries, including the United States. Although the EEC accounts for the majority of Ethiopia's foreign aid, such assistance represents less foreign development aid per capita than any other country. Most of the grant Ethiopia has received in recent years has been in the form of humanitarian relief aid. The United States, for example, has been generous in its provision of relief aid, but has been firm in its refusal to provide Ethiopia with rehabilitation and development assistance. Other potential donors, including Japan, are interested in giving large development and low interest loans to Ethiopia, but seem reluctant to move until Ethiopia-US relations improve. On its part, the US is proceeding cautiously in reestablishing good relations with Ethiopia.<sup>37</sup>

#### **The Border Politics of Afro-Marxist Ethiopia**

Ethiopia's Afro-Marxist regime, like the imperial regime which preceded it, has been constantly concerned with maintaining a positive international image and with preserving the country's territorial integrity. This could be clearly seen in the regime's relations with African and Middle Eastern countries, as well as in its activities at the OAU, UN, and Conference of Nonaligned States. Since 1974, the regime has repeatedly pledged its solidarity not only with the other peoples of Africa, but also with all progressive forces throughout the world, including the West. To legitimize its position, the regime quotes the charters of the United Nations and the Organization of African Unity and pledges endorsement of the principles of peaceful coexistence. Significantly, the rhetoric of the regime emphasizes peace and friendship, not proletarian internationalism and class struggle.<sup>38</sup>

As the Afro-Marxist regime has attempted to consolidate its rule over the past decade and a half, it has had to cope with serious border problems, particularly with Somalia and Sudan. The bone of contention with Somalia has been the Ogaden

region, an area the Somalis claim was a part of the historic Somali nation seized by the Ethiopians during the colonial partition of the Horn. The Ethiopians claim the area to be a part of historic Ethiopia. Upon realizing their independence from European colonial rule in 1960, the inhabitants of the Republic of Somalia held out hope that no matter what method or what cost, all Somalis would eventually be united into a modern nation-state. Somali claims to the Ogaden, Djibouti, and parts of Kenya's Northeastern Province have, however, been consistently rejected by the United Nations, the Organization of African Unity, and by most of the world's sovereign states. Still, Somali politicians have not been willing to publicly forsake these claims. This has been a source of tension between Somalia and its neighbors Kenya and Ethiopia for almost three decades.<sup>39</sup>

Less than a year after Somalia's independence in 1960, its troops clashed with Ethiopian soldiers along their common border. In 1964, tensions erupted again and resulted in a minor regional war. In both cases, Somalia was defeated. Ethnic Somalis in Kenya's northeast also unsuccessfully challenged that country's new government in the early 1960s. Pan-Somalism, then, has served as a basis for the continuance of cooperative relations between Kenya and Ethiopia for over 25 years, despite the regime change. The two countries first signed a mutual defense agreement in 1964 that resulted in the creation of the Ethiopia-Kenya Border Administration Commission.<sup>40</sup>

The most serious conflict between Ethiopia and Somalia occurred in 1977 and 1978 with the outbreak of the Ogaden War. Beginning in the early summer of 1977, regular Somali troops and guerrillas from the Western Somalia Liberation Front (WSLF), a guerrilla movement of ethnic Somalis opposed to incorporation in Ethiopia, occupied vast tracts of the Ogaden, and forced the Ethiopian army into fortresses at Jijiga, Harar, and Dire Dawa for almost eight months. The intention was to separate the Ogaden from Ethiopia to set the stage for ethnic Somalis in the region to decide their own future. It was only with the assistance of the USSR and Cuba that the Ethiopians were able to regain control over the region by early 1978. The Soviets provided not only massive amounts of military equipment, but also advisers who trained Ethiopian soldiers and



pilots for combat missions in MiGs and helicopters. Moreover, Cuban troops, whose numbers peaked at 17,000 after early 1978, spearheaded the counter-offensive that began in March of that year. Combat operations during the counter-offensive were orchestrated by the National Revolutionary Operations Command consisting of two Soviet generals, one Cuban general, and Mengistu. More than 55,000 soldiers were in the field on the Ethiopian side at the height of the counter offensive. Most of these were from a hastily created "people's militia." These militiamen were expected to overwhelm the Somalis by their sheer numbers. The Somali and WSLF forces, which numbered only about 10,000 were quickly routed once the counter-offensive began. Many WSLF fighters simply gave up the fight and returned to their villages or took refuge inside Somalia. From this point on, Ogadeni opposition took the form of sporadic guerrilla ambushes and occasional acts of sabotage. By 1989, even guerrilla actions were more difficult than in 1977-78 because of the increased Ethiopian military presence in the Ogaden, and because of agreements between the governments of Somalia and Ethiopia intended to normalize relations.<sup>41</sup>

As a consequence of an April 1988 agreement, both sides agreed to withdraw support from any opposition groups operating in the other country, to demilitarize the border zone between Ethiopia and Somalia, to stop interfering in each other's internal affairs, and to convene a joint ministerial committee to resolve the long-standing border dispute. Consequently, the WSLF was forced to cease directing its Ogaden operations from Mogadishu. What serious Ogadeni opposition to Ethiopian rule exists today is represented in the relatively recent Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), founded in 1984. The ONLF views the regimes of Presidents Mengistu and Barre as co-conspirators in the suppression of the Ogadeni people's right to self-determination. The movement operates clandestinely inside Somalia, but most of its activities are confined to propaganda warfare outside the region.<sup>42</sup>

Significantly, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) has been both unable and unwilling to resolve the Ethiopia-Somalia dispute once and for all. Although the OAU Commission of Mediation, Conciliation, and Arbitration is responsible for settling disputes between member states, it has histori-

cally left that task to various ad hoc commissions and committees of the OAU member states to perform. The OAU refrained from becoming involved in the dispute until 1973 when tensions intensified. The issue was placed on the agenda of the tenth ordinary session of the OAU at Addis Ababa. It decided that an eight-country good-offices committee be given the responsibility of helping bring about a normalization of relations between Ethiopia and Somalia and a final resolution of the border dispute. The good offices committee included: Nigeria, Cameroon, Liberia, Lesotho, Mauritania, Senegal, Sudan, and Tanzania. The work of the committee went a long way towards reducing tensions between the two countries, but this resolution, as others in the past, proved to be tenuous and short-lived. The Ogaden War dashed this progress.<sup>43</sup>

When the OAU met in Libreville, Gabon, in July 1977, the invasion of the Ogaden by the WSLF and elements of the regular Somali armed forces was already in progress. A good offices committee was once again constituted to attempt to restore peace between the warring countries, but this effort failed. Somalia saw the early battlefield success of the combined Somali-WSLF forces as leverage that could be used in wringing concessions from the Ethiopians. The Somali government insisted on WSLF participation in peace talks as a precondition for negotiations. This position was unacceptable to the Ethiopians. On their part, the Ethiopians demanded that Somalia publicly renounce claims to the Ogaden. The Somalis rejected such a possibility. The two sides remained steadfast in their preconditions for a negotiated settlement to the Ogaden war. The OAU was unable to encourage them to soften their stances, and tensions between Ethiopia and Somalia abated only when the Ethiopians established their military superiority and forced the Somalis to retreat. Military exhaustion more than anything else influenced the 1988 accords, the most significant ever concluded between Ethiopia and Somalia. The agreement did much to reduce tensions along the Ethiopia-Somalia border.<sup>44</sup>

Relations between Ethiopia and Sudan were generally good until the mid-1980s after the emergence of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) as an effective challenge to the hegemony of Khartoum. Emperor Haile Selassie had been

instrumental in mediating the Sudan civil war in 1972. However, Ethiopia regularly expressed disappointment that the Sudan government had not effectively prevented elements of the Eritrean liberation movement from operating out of its territory. Sudan did attempt to negotiate an end to the Eritrean conflict in 1975, but was unsuccessful. When Ethiopia turned to the Soviet Union and away from the United States, Sudan became concerned. President Numayri had accused the Soviets of having inspired coup attempts against his regime in 1971 and 1976. Sudan's ambassador to Ethiopia was recalled in January 1977, and for several years serious border tensions existed between the two countries.<sup>45</sup>

Ethiopia's turn to the Eastern Bloc and Libya as allies caused Sudan to seek out the support of its own allies in preparing for the possibility of external invasions sponsored by its regional enemies. Numayri decided to openly support the Ethiopian Democratic Union, an Ethiopian opposition group composed of former officials of the imperial government. In addition, he supported Somalia against Ethiopia. Numayri claimed that he wanted to build a "high wall against communism" in the Horn, and agreed to participate with the United States, Kenya, Egypt, Somalia, and Oman in offering facilities to the US Rapid Deployment Force (RDF). By 1980, the tensions between Sudan and Ethiopia abated, with the signing of a peace treaty calling for the mutual respect of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the two countries.<sup>46</sup>

The development of the RDF and its annual "Bright Star" operations in the Horn and Persian Gulf inspired Libya, Ethiopia, and South Yemen to forge an alliance to sign a mutual defense treaty in 1981, in which they pledged "joint struggle against imperialism." From this point on, border tensions between Sudan and Ethiopia reappeared. The Ethiopian regime began to support the activities of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) against the Sudan government. After Numayri was overthrown in 1985, the new government made it clear that it wanted to improve relations with Ethiopia as well as Libya. This was seen as a first step in the resolution of Sudan's "southern problem." The change in regimes in Sudan also was accompanied by a deterioration in US-Sudan relations and the Sudan's cancellation of the agreement

calling for participation of Sudan troops in the joint annual military exercises of "Bright Star". Despite Sudan's estrangement from the US and its growing closeness to Libya after 1985, there was no substantive improvement in Ethiopian-Sudanese relations. The problem continued to center on Sudan's support for the Eritrean Liberation Movement and Mengistu's continued support of the SPLA. By 1989, the leaders of the two countries made public overtures offering to negotiate their respective wars along their common border, but almost nothing tangible came of this.<sup>47</sup>

In an effort to undermine regional support for the Eritrean Liberation Movement, after 1987, the Ethiopian government began to attempt to develop good relations with the Arab countries of the Middle East. Between 1987 and 1989, high level Ethiopian delegations visited Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Libya, and Saudi Arabia. For example, in the fall of 1988, President Mengistu paid a two day visit to Syria for the purpose of explaining to President Assad the various reforms the Ethiopian regime had recently made, including the creation of autonomous regions, designed to be responsive to the desires of groups like the Eritreans. Prime Minister Fikre Selassie made a visit to Cairo in November 1988 to seek improved relations between Ethiopia and Egypt and to express support for Egypt's offer to negotiate a settlement in the Ethiopia-Eritrea conflict. Despite these moves, Ethiopia's relations with the countries of the Middle East remained minimal. The only concern of the regime seems to be the alleviation of external pressures upon it relating to the Eritrean question.<sup>48</sup>

By 1989, Ethiopia's desperate need for arms appears to have inspired Ethiopia to develop closer relations with Israel. In that year, diplomatic relations between the two countries were normalized for the first time since they were broken off in 1973. Israel was interested in securing the emigration of the remaining Falashas (Ethiopian Jews) from Ethiopia to Israel. In return, it was prepared to provide Ethiopia with military assistance. Nine thousand Falashas had left Ethiopia for Sudan and had been brought from there to Israel in a secret air and sea lift known as Operation Moses.<sup>49</sup> The renewed ties between Ethiopia and Israel can only be understood in terms of the desperate need of the Afro-Marxist regime's need for military support to

carry on its various wars. With the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc withdrawing or reducing their aid to Ethiopia, the Mengistu regime was running out of sources of military support. Moreover, the restoration of Ethiopia-Israel relations seems to have undermined whatever progress the Addis Ababa regime had made in its relations with Arab states of the region. Libyan leader Muammar al-Qadhafi, for example, threatened joint Arab action against Ethiopia for renewing relations with Israel.<sup>50</sup>

## Conclusions

The essence of Ethiopia's foreign policy has not changed over the past century despite the change in regime. Although the imperial regime was displaced by a military-based Afro-Marxist government, the main focus of the country's foreign policy continues to be the desire to have the multiethnic character of the nation-state internationally accepted as legitimate and to defend its territorial integrity. Until recently, these goals were pursued with the substantial military aid of a superpower patron. The patron changed over the years, but the reasons for the alliance did not. The primary goals of succeeding regimes have been international respectability and territorial integrity. The ideological character of the current regime is less important for what it is than for what it does. It provides the government with the organizational power to tightly control politics in the country and facilitates the provision of arms from Eastern Bloc allies. There are signs that relations between Ethiopia and the Eastern Bloc may deteriorate in the decade of the 1990s. Should this happen, the Ethiopian regime will be hard pressed to resist pressures for reform being applied upon it by various opposition movements.

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# **The Other Side of the Red Sea and a Little More: The Horn of Africa and the Two Yemens**

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**Unlike that of the rhino, the Horn of Africa has ceased to be of much interest or value to the two Yemens.**

**--Anon**

On a clear day, you can see the foothills of the Horn of Africa from the Yemen's coastal desert. The strategic significance of the Horn of Africa and the two Yemens in world politics is determined in part by their proximity to one another, each forming one side of the narrow passage out of the southern end of the Red Sea and the western end of the Gulf of Aden. In recent centuries, and well before the opening of the Suez Canal, various European powers sought control over either or both sides of the southern end of the Red Sea; a major 20th century case is Mussolini's interest in North Yemen as well as Ethiopia.

Historically, the links between the two sides of the Red Sea are strong. Both Ethiopia and Yemen lay claim to the biblical Queen of Sheba, and Ethiopia is thought to be the botanical source long ago of the two plants for which Yemen is most famous, coffee and qat.

Physical proximity and close historical links suggest that the intersection of the contemporary politics of the two Yemens and those of the states of the Horn of Africa should be large. Has this been the case in the last third of the 20th century, a time when the politics of nation-state building came to full flower on both sides of the Red Sea? More

specifically, have the domestic political dynamics of the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR) and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) noticeably affected or been affected by the politics of the Horn? If so, to what extent and in what ways?

Answers to these questions may be sought in two recent periods, the second half of the 1970s and the second half of the 1980s. The political turmoil in the Horn of Africa in the former period is well known to students of international politics, and many will recollect the name of one or another Yemeni politician cropping up in the course of this high drama. Less familiar is the story of the PDRY's leadership crisis, strained inter-Yemeni relations in the second half of the 1980s, and the parts played by the countries of the Horn in efforts to solve these interrelated problems.

## **The Domestic Political Dynamics of the Two Yemens**

The domestic political dynamics of the two Yemens consist primarily of the politics of two late-developing countries still in the very early stages of nation-state building, a task complicated in this instance by an old and widely-shared notion of one Yemen and Yemeni people. The two Yemens have waged two border wars with each other, in 1972 and 1979, and the YAR regime was the object of a PDRY-backed rebellion from 1979 until 1982. The Yemens extricated themselves from each of these deadly conflicts by improbably agreeing to rapid and total political unification. They have not united, and probably will not unite, but events in the 1980s suggest that the idea of one Yemen will prove strong enough to support soon extensive cooperation and coordination.<sup>1</sup>

The 1962 Revolution, which put the Yemen Arab Republic in the place of the Zaydi imamate, catapulted North Yemen from the sixteenth to the beginning of the nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> Its isolation and insulation from the outside world ended by the revolution, resource-poor North Yemen went from being a largely self-contained, self-sufficient socioeconomic system based mainly on subsistence agriculture and minuscule foreign trade, to one increasingly and irreversibly plugged into, and very asymmetrically dependent upon, the modern world and its economic order. In particular, the YAR gradually became deeply dependent upon oil-rich Saudi Arabia for financial aid and for the remittances sent home by the many Yemenis working in the booming Saudi economy. Other forces that buffeted the new YAR from the outset, among them civil war, foreign military intervention, economic dislocation, and drought, made it obvious that political construction and state-building in all of their aspects were desperately needed if the archaic kingstate and traditional society were to be transformed into a sociopolitical system with at least a minimal capacity for survival.

After two fitful decades that embraced the tenures of five heads of state, the assassination of two of them, two border wars, and one rebellion, the YAR since the early 1980s has enjoyed modest but cumulative success with political and socioeconomic development. Future prospects now look relatively bright. Recent successes and future prospects owe much to the stability and policies of the more than ten-year-old regime of President Ali Abdullah Salih and, more recently, to the discovery and rapid development of sizable oil reserves. Nevertheless, these gains are fragile and have by no means become self-sustaining.

The PDRY was severely deformed as well as undeveloped when Britain departed in late 1967 after more than 125 years of colonial rule.<sup>3</sup> It consisted of the 75-square-mile Aden Colony, a partly modern city-state and major port, and a vast, mostly remote and backward, politically fragmented hinterland. Aden was plugged, not into this hinterland, but into the British Treasury and the sea lanes between Europe and Asia. Its vulnerability became apparent when the Suez Canal was closed by the June 1967 Arab-Israeli war, and when the British hastily withdrew their forces and cut off subsidies in 1968.

The British left control of South Yemen nominally in the hands of the National Liberation Front (NLF). The NLF and its offspring, the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP), opted in stages and through a number of purges for a kind of Marxism involving both a radical socialist path to development and internationalism instead of pan-Arabism. The PDRY's Marxist ideology and program probably yielded greater benefits than costs over the years. The costs were real, and included the flight of capital and skills, the loss of aid from the West and conservative Arab states, and the hostile actions of Saudi Arabia. Nevertheless, the embattled, politically-isolated leaders of the fledgling regime devoted much effort to the creation of a party and state structure able to secure and control the country. They built institutions that trained cadres, cemented new loyalties, and spread "scientific socialism." Their considerable success can be seen in the fact that, despite fierce and sometimes bloody intraparty struggles, rule by the NLF or YSP has not been threatened seriously since independence in 1967.

Austerity was imposed, sacrifices were made, and corruption minimized during the PDRY's desperate early years. Despite mistakes and failures, the regime slowly learned to use its meager resources to promote, on a modest scale, economic development, social welfare, and equality. Major concerns were national integration and the physical infrastructure required for its achievement. With the beginning of the 1980s, moreover, increases in development aid and remittances from overseas workers eased somewhat the severe financial constraints, making possible a few new large projects. These trends were encouraged by new policies of domestic relaxation and regional moderation. These same trends were jeopardized by the convulsive intraparty blood bath in January 1986, a situation made more frustrating by the long-hoped-for discovery of oil only months later. Suddenly, the question asked was whether the PDRY would fritter away its new chances, and possibly those of the YAR in the bargain.

The existence of the idea of one Yemen means that the domestic politics of each of the Yemens is closely linked to its very important external relations with the other Yemen as well as to the other Yemen's domestic politics. In this regard, the two Yemens constitute a definable political dyad, but one in which the boundaries between the two parts are

blurred. It is often hard to tell where the one Yemen ends and the other begins, and where, for each of the Yemens, domestic politics end and external politics begin.

To complicate the picture, the relations between the two Yemens and the domestic political dynamics of each of them is conditioned greatly by the very salient relations between each of them and their neighbor, Saudi Arabia. The Saudis have often involved themselves directly in the domestic politics of the Yemens and, in a more complicated game, have sometimes acted in each of the Yemens through the other.<sup>4</sup>

Accordingly, across the Red Sea from the Horn of Africa is a very durable triangular subsystem composed of the two Yemens and Saudi Arabia, one in which the domestic and external political domains of at least the two Yemeni members penetrate each other greatly. Consequently, to ask about relationships between the countries of the Horn of Africa and their nearest neighbors across the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden is to ask about their relationships to this Southwest Arabian triangle.

### **The Yemens and the Horn In the Second Half of the 1970s**

The Horn of Africa by the late 1970s suddenly became a prominent trouble spot in what, in retrospect, appears to have been a lesser ice age in the receding Cold War. The superpowers were already there in low profile at mid-decade, the United States as longtime patron of Haile Selassie's Ethiopia and the Sudan, and the Soviet Union as new patron of Somalia. The opportunities afforded by the upheaval in Ethiopia after the 1974 revolution transformed the Horn into a harbinger of the revived Cold War. This, in turn, spurred revivals of the Eritrean rebellion, Somali aspirations for Ogadan, and talk of renewed rebellion in southern Sudan. Suddenly, everything seemed up for grabs, and the superpowers were in there grabbing, upping the stakes in the local and regional game. Ethiopia's lurch left and Somalia's move right translated into a rollicking, everything up-for-grabs game of musical chairs played at least by these two countries, the Soviet Union, and the United States. Moreover, Djibouti, about to become independent, seemed ripe for the picking. Things were happening in the Horn,

the stakes seemed high, and the outcomes appeared unpredictable.<sup>5</sup>

**Attending to the Horn.** The feeding frenzy of the superpowers and lesser fish on the Horn triggered a strong response on the part of the three Southwest Arabian states. Saudi Arabia became increasingly concerned in the second half of the 1970s with the larger strategic significance of, first, events on the Horn itself, and later, the Horn's place in the "arc of revolution" curving southwest from Afghanistan and Iran through the Yemens to Ethiopia and on to Angola on the other side of Africa. As in the past, the Saudis were truly alarmed by the possible effects of creeping socialism, democracy, or merely populism on the legitimacy of their archaic, albeit hybrid, regime.

For their part, PDRY leaders also increasingly saw the Horn at this time in broad if not global perspective. They saw the struggle there as part of the world revolution of which they, too, were a part, and they identified with the popular forces struggling against imperialism and feudalism in Ethiopia as well as Afghanistan, Iran, and Angola.<sup>6</sup> On a more opportunistic level, moreover, they saw events in the Horn as means of both increasing desperately needed external aid and lessening the extreme isolation to which their step-by-step radicalization had subjected them since 1967. Here was a way to gain entrance to the socialist camp, at least as a candidate member, and, more importantly, to trade access to military transit facilities and other assets for increased aid from a grateful Soviet Union and other socialist countries.

By 1977, however, the trajectory of events in the Horn forced upon the PDRY a costly political and economic tradeoff. To the extent that the Eritrean and Ogadan rebellions were embraced as Arab causes, and the former widely was, then close friendship with revolutionary Ethiopia and the provision of facilities to those aiding Ethiopia made the PDRY look more revolutionary than otherwise and pushed it to opt for socialist internationalism over Arabism. Unfortunately for the PDRY, this came at a time when it was beginning to have some success trading a softening of such revolutionary stances as support of the Dhufar rebellion and the YAR opposition for financial aid from Saudi Arabia and other Arab Gulf oil states. Increasingly, it came down to an either/or situation: either Saudi Arabia

and the Arab mainstream, or the Soviet Union and the socialist camp. The PDRY's choice of the latter went a long way toward returning it to solitary confinement on the peninsula by the end of the 1970s.

As important, the drift toward the either/or situation on external alignments fed and was fed by the increasingly intense domestic political struggle between the two scorpions-in-a-bottle who had dominated PDRY politics since 1970, party chief Abd al-Fattah Ismail and head-of-state Salim Rubai Ali. The latter saw advantage for the PDRY and himself in better relations with the YAR, Saudi Arabia, and the other oil-rich conservative Arab states, and hence advocated a policy of moderation in the region and a stronger Arab line. The former was more strictly pro-Soviet, and saw benefits for the PDRY and his tenure in solidarity with the socialist camp and revolution around the world. These two increasingly irreconcilable foes inside the YSP used the choices being imposed by events in the Horn in their conflict with each other, and, in turn, their worsening conflict made these choices sharper and less avoidable.

The YAR leaders' perspective in the Horn was narrower and probably more opportunistic than that of the PDRY. The Eritrean rebellion provided four successive heads of state in the 1970s and 1980s with a relatively simple, safe way of proving the YAR's Arabism and worth to the Arab world, and each of these leaders provided the Eritrean rebels with moral and some material support over these years.

President Ibrahim al-Hamdi, who came to power in a coup in 1974, tended to narrow the larger Horn of Africa question down to that of "Red Sea security," a subject first raised as an Arab issue by Egypt in the 1960s and then revived by Saudi Arabia as well as Egypt in the 1970s. Al-Hamdi's position held there was a vaguely-defined issue of Red Sea security, one that should be met by the countries bordering on the sea and without superpower involvement. More specifically, he argued the two Yemens were best able to deal with this issue, and the Saudis should provide them, or at least the YAR, with the military and economic wherewithal to do so.

If all the pieces fell in place, this stance had the beauty of simultaneously strengthening al-Hamdi's

position vis-a-vis the two external actors which posed the real treats to his security: conservative Saudi Arabia and the revolutionary PDRY. The enhanced stature and increased inflow of arms and other aid that would come with this new role of Red Sea policeman, even if the aid came from the Saudis, would serve to make al-Hamdi less dependent upon his rich, demanding neighbor, giving him some of the breathing room at home that he thought he needed. If the PDRY joined him in the security task, then it could hardly criticize much less try to subvert him openly; if it chose not to join in the task, then the YAR would be able to take a holier (more Arab and Yemeni) than thou position relative to the often politically self-righteous PDRY. Given the Saudis' fear of inter-Yemeni cooperation and their strategy of playing the one Yemen off against the other, al-Hamdi's call for a strong, well-armed YAR with normalized if not close relations with the PDRY must have caused them to wonder if the secure Red Sea they desired was worth the political price and risks entailed.

The domestic politics of the YAR in the mid-1970s had pushed the ambitious al-Hamdi to seize upon the regional issue of Red Sea security.<sup>7</sup> A confirmed statist intent on strengthening the state, he had come to power in 1974 with the support of the leading tribalists and Saudi Arabia. Aware that with Saudi encouragement, the biggest shaykhs were using their strategic positions in the state to protect the tribal system from further state encroachment, he moved quickly and deftly in 1975 to drive them from those key positions. The state-tribe standoff that resulted had the effect of decreasing the domain of the state and narrowing the base of support for the state and the al-Hamdi regime. His efforts to make up for this loss by reincorporating the alienated modern left, only recently united in the new National Democratic Front (NDF), seemed hesitant and eventually failed, leaving him quite vulnerable to elements opposed to his rule at home and abroad.

President al-Hamdi's attempt to capitalize on the Red Sea security issue came to a climax on 22 and 23 March 1977 when he hosted a Red Sea summit in Taiz that brought together the heads of state of the two Yemens, Sudan, and Somalia. Although it served to focus the regional spotlight briefly on him and the YAR, the summit almost failed to come off at all, took place with the conspicuous absence of



Ethiopia, and was upstaged by Fidel Castro's concurrent shuttling about the region and his call for a union of its socialist states. The continuing retreat from detente globally and the growing conflict among some of the countries of the Horn, indeed, the open warfare between Ethiopia and Somalia over the Ogadan, made futile the summit's call for an expanded meeting of all the countries on the Red Sea.

**The Yemens Turn Inward Toward the Abyss.** Events in the two Yemens, no doubt prodded initially by those of the Horn and the mood they fostered, soon caused politics within and between the two Yemens to turn inward and, as a corollary, to become less coupled and reactive to even important happenings in the Horn. This focusing process got a big push in October 1977 when al-Hamdi was assassinated by senior army officers who probably acted with the knowledge if not the urging of leading Saudis. This event marked the beginning of five years of turbulence in the domestic politics of each of the Yemens as well as in inter-Yemeni relations.

The PDRY, convinced he was the Saudis' man, opposed al-Hamdi's successor, Ahmad al-Ghashmi, and expressed its opposition by supporting the new organized opposition in the YAR, the NDF. In June 1978, an implosion caused the boundaries between the domestic politics of the two Yemens and inter-Yemeni relations to dissolve. Only eight months after coming to power, President al-Ghashmi and an emissary of President Salim Rubai Ali of the PDRY were blown to bits in al-Ghashmi's office by a booby-trapped briefcase carried by the apparently unsuspecting emissary. The evidence suggests that al-Ghashmi was the innocent victim of the last stage of the domestic political competition between the PDRY's two co-leaders. As he had done a year earlier with al-Hamdi, President Rubai Ali had tried to strengthen himself in his struggle with Abd al-Fattah Ismail by improving "brotherly" ties with his YAR counterpart, and his sending of an emissary north in June 1978 was part of this design. Unfortunately for him, Ismail's people apparently interceded and substituted a bomb-bearing dupe for the real emissary. Fierce fighting between the two YSP factions erupted as soon as the news of al-Ghashmi's death reached Aden, and within hours President Rubai Ali's forces were defeated and their leader summarily executed by Ismail's faction.<sup>8</sup> In the

space of eight months the two Yemens had lost three presidents, two to assassination and one to summary execution.

The events of June 1978 caused the YAR to hangrue and break with Aden, the Arab League to adopt a toothless condemnation, and the United States to cancel moves to restore relations that were to include a diplomatic visit to Aden on the very week that the two presidents were killed. Within the PDRY, Ismail quickly consolidated power, took a strong pro-Soviet line, and placed the PDRY loudly on the side of anti-imperialism and other progressive forces worldwide. By 1979, the PDRY was regularly critical of the new YAR regime headed by Ali Abdullah Salih and was giving much support to what was developing into a full-scale rebellion by the NDF; in the spring of that year, the two Yemens fought the second of their indecisive border wars, this one initiated more by the PDRY and the NDF than by the YAR.

By the end of the second half of the 1970s, the only thing that partially obscured the degree to which the PDRY was on the very edge of the Arab world, as much politically as geographically, was the more-or-less united Arab rejection of Egypt and the Camp David accords. The PDRY signed a tripartite agreement with Ethiopia and Libya in 1981, an event which, while of no real consequence, indicated the position in the world shared by these three countries at this time. For its part, the Salih regime in the YAR had to cope with a nearly successful Libyan-backed coup attempt in the fall of 1978 and the border war and spreading NDF rebellion in 1979. The very survival of the regime was still at stake by year's end, leaving it little time for concern about or interest in events on the Horn of Africa.

The temptation is strong to draw a causal link between Soviet machinations in the Horn in 1976-1977 and the attack across the YAR's southern border by PDRY forces and PDRY-supported NDF rebels in 1979. After all, this aggression fell right on the "arc of revolution," and President Carter did speed the flow of arms to the YAR as a demonstration of the United States' willingness to back up its friends and stand up to communist-inspired aggression. This temptation should be resisted, however. Although they did get drawn into political events in the Horn in which the superpowers were deeply involved, the two Yemens soon turned inward, and

the events from al-Hamdi's assassination in 1977 to the end of the NDF rebellion in 1982 belong to a largely closed and self-contained system of intra- and inter-Yemeni politics.

### **The Yemens and the Horn in the Second Half of the 1980s**

Prospects for the two Yemens looked good in 1985, better than at any time since the two republics were created. The YAR seemed especially on a roll, its strong economic prospects matched by signs of domestic political strength and stability. The oil discovered near Marib in 1984 proved to be of commercial quantity, and 1985 was taken up with steps toward its rapid development. Although poor economic conditions had required adoption of an austerity program, an impressive set of development projects was proceeding apace.

Domestically, President Salih achieved what had been thought impossible by most observers only several years earlier. A complex program of political development launched in 1980 had resulted in considerable support and legitimacy for himself as well as for new state institutions and a new political organization, the General People's Congress (GPC). In 1985, the electoral base was greatly broadened in anticipation of new GPC elections in 1986.<sup>9</sup>

Although there was less cause for celebration in Aden than in Sanaa, a sense of optimism and improving fortunes were in the air there, too. Despite bitter opposition on his left, President Ali Nasir Muhammad al-Hasani seemed firmly in power in 1985, five years after he bloodlessly deposed Abd al-Fattah Ismail. It was widely believed that oil would soon be found in the area of the PDRY adjacent to the YAR's Marib basin. President Muhammad's policy of regional moderation and courtship of likely donors had begun to pay off in aid from international organizations, socialist and western industrial countries, and, most important, Saudi Arabia and the other Arab Gulf oil states.

Inter-Yemeni ties were better than ever before, and the two regimes which had mixed border warfare and subversion with pledges of unification over nearly two decades were becoming increasingly enmeshed in a network of social, economic, political, and diplomatic cooperation.<sup>10</sup> The Supreme Yemeni Council, chaired by the two presidents, met twice in 1985. Improved ties were largely the result

of the respect and good working relationship between presidents Salih and Muhammad, a relationship that proved its worth in January 1985 when the two presidents quickly defused a confrontation between their armed forces along the undemarcated border near the YAR's new oil field.

The YAR strongly supported President Muhammad's steps to normalize relations with the conservative Arab states. For one thing, a moderate PDRY made it more possible for the YAR to have good ties with both Saudi Arabia and the PDRY, a situation next to impossible in the past. Relations between the two Yemens did not seem to suffer much from the YAR's close ties with the moderate Arab majority and those of the PDRY with the radical Steadfastness Front.

**Intraparty Conflict and Strained Inter-Yemeni Relations.** The intraparty blood bath that erupted in Aden on 13 January 1986 threw into question recent positive projections. The spiritual leader of the growing "leftist" opposition to President Muhammad was Abd al-Fattah Ismail, allowed to return from exile only in late 1984. Concerned that his opponents might be ready to depose him, President Muhammad decided to act preemptively in early 1986. He lured them to a Politburo meeting and had nearly all of them, Ismail included, gunned down in cold blood. The shoot-out at the top spread like wildfire; it failed to escalate into full-blown civil war because of both the superior firepower of President Muhammad's opponents and his mistake of fleeing across the border into the YAR. Order was restored after 12 days of fierce battles which consumed several thousand lives and hundreds of millions of dollars worth of property.<sup>11</sup>

Although the victors saddled the ex-president with full responsibility for the "13 January Conspiracy," the truth is that each side had long conspired against the other and that the fruit of their conspiracies was the virtual decapitation of the regime they had shared. When the smoke cleared, the ex-president and some of the other leading losers were alive but abroad, along with thousands of followers, whereas nearly all of the top leaders of the "winning" militant faction were dead. Indeed, some 50 of the roughly 75 members of the YSP Central Committee, the core of a generation of leaders and rulers, were gone.

The group that took control in late January was less well known and less politically experienced than the

former leaders. Moreover, the regime of survivors was a mixed bag of a few hard-line politicians and a larger number of generally more moderate technocrats and officers. The politicians assumed the top posts in the YSP; for example, Ali Salim al-Baydh became its secretary-general. The most prominent technocrats took top government posts, among them Haydar Abu-Bakr al-Attas, prime minister in the just deposed government, who became the new head of state.

The increasingly close ties between the two Yemens in the first half of the 1980s, cemented as they were by the close rapport between presidents Muhammad and Salih, were jolted and sorely strained by the events of January 1986. The YAR officially had little to say and maintained its distance for weeks. From the outset, the new leaders in Aden both knew that they would benefit greatly from public YAR approval and wanted assurances that the Salih regime would not help ex-president Muhammad overthrow them. In no hurry to restore strong ties with the PDRY or to embrace its new leaders, the YAR regime first wanted to see solid evidence of a continuation of the ex-president's policy of regional detente. Most important, it wanted to be honorably relieved of the heavy burden of providing for the thousands of new refugees. The YAR leaders saw the means to this end to be a resolution of the PDRY's leadership crisis through some form of reconciliation between the ex-president and the new regime. Accordingly, they made the resolution of this crisis the main condition for "brotherly" relations between the two Yemens, a condition placed out of reach by the refusal of the new leaders to accept the ex-president's initial insistence on an almost total reconciliation.

"The 13 January Events" remained the main source of the problems still plaguing PDRY politics over two years later in the spring of 1988. Although the grimmest early predictions did not come to pass, fighting did not resume and the ex-president did not try to wage war over the YAR border, the uncertain and potentially volatile situation did not change greatly over this period. YSP Secretary-General al-Baydh and President al-Attas did not assert strong leadership, and the regime remained relatively weak, ineffective, and fractious. The factions tended to compete in terms of how loyal each was to the "scientific socialism" of the martyred Ismail.

Those who would be pragmatic and, for example, open to West Germany and the United States, vigorously seek private investment, decentralize governance, and even sacrifice principle a bit to resolve the leadership crisis, could not do so for fear of being outflanked by the purists on the left. As a result, the PDRY, which the Soviet Union regards as merely a "state of socialist orientation," was locked into a pattern of talking more socialist than its patron, this at a time when perestroika was the new socialist buzzword.

Actions specifically intended to close the books on the January 1986 events, including the amnesty announced in Aden for the refugees in the YAR and the treason trial of the ex-president and 141 of his colleagues, failed to achieve that result. The amnesty had few takers because most of those for whom it was intended believed that they would return as second-class citizens. The "13 January Conspiracy" trial dragged on for a full year after it opened in December 1986; daily public sessions kept the issues and personalities of the past alive, reopened old wounds, triggered new fears, and sharpened conflicts. Prospects for healing intraparty wounds were jolted in mid-December 1987 by results of the trial that included the sentencing of the ex-president and 34 of his colleagues to death. Although many of these and lesser sentences were quickly reduced, the death sentences of the ex-president and 10 others were reaffirmed. Remaining hopes for reconciliation were dashed when five of the condemned were executed by year's end.

The new regime in Aden had from the outset tried to wrap itself in the legitimizing rhetoric of Yemeni unification, and the YAR just as stubbornly had refused to reciprocate with similar declarations or to convene the institutional embodiment of the unification movement, the Supreme Yemeni Council. Although both regimes spoke euphemistically of the need to deal with the lingering effects of the "events," they did not admit publicly that the improvement of relations between them was contingent on the resolution of the intraparty crisis and the refugee problem. In fact, however, inter-Yemeni talks in 1986 and 1987 dwelled on these issues and were virtually trilateral talks among the YAR regime, the new regime in Aden, and the ex-president's representatives.

The first high-level inter-Yemeni meetings after the January 1986 events, bringing together the presidents of the two Yemens in Libya in July of that year, failed to restore "brotherly ties," and relations remained cool for the next year. New efforts were made during visits to Sanaa by Secretary-General al-Baydh in July 1987 and by President al-Attas in September. Both efforts failed. The major stumbling block remained the unwillingness of the regime in Aden to allow those followers of the ex-president who accepted its amnesty to return to positions comparable to those they had previously occupied. The conspiracy trial results and the five executions set back farther chances for improved inter-Yemeni relations.

**Responses in the Horn and Elsewhere to the Crises.** Nearly all regimes with salient relations with the PDRY had for various reasons been comfortable with President Muhammad and the evolution of his foreign relations, and thus were surprised and dismayed by the January 1986 events. The regime of Mengistu Haile Miriam in Ethiopia was no exception. Political ties between the revolutionary regimes in Addis Ababa and Aden, first forged in the late 1970s, had become very close by the mid-1980s. President Muhammad paid a long visit to Addis on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of Ethiopia's revolution in September 1984. On that occasion, the two countries joined to ask for a delay of the Red Sea conference called for by the Sudan's President Jaafar al-Numayri to respond to the recent mining of the lower end of the Red Sea. Contacts between the two countries were unusually extensive in 1985, and included visits to Addis by the PDRY foreign minister in August and October as well as a visit by President Mengistu to Aden in September. Behind these increasingly close ties were both a convergence of perceived national interests and the good personal relationship between the two presidents. These ties flourished outside the framework of the moribund tripartite alliance of Libya, Ethiopia, and the PDRY.

Ethiopia had no choice but to be drawn into the PDRY's intraparty fight during its first days in January 1986. Gunboats and crews from the PDRY navy took sanctuary in Ethiopia, relatives of ex-president Muhammad, a son included, found refuge in the Ethiopian embassy in Aden, and the ex-president himself briefly visited Addis only a few days

after fleeing across the border into the YAR. Thereafter, however, the Mengistu regime as a matter of policy actively involved itself in two of the most intensive outside attempts to reconcile the factions in the intraparty conflict and to mend inter-Yemeni relations, once in 1986 and again in 1987. Ethiopia was host to serious but fruitless negotiations among a team headed by a leader in the new regime in Aden, people from ex-president Muhammad's faction, and Soviet diplomats in May 1986, only a few months after the fighting before playing an active role in events surrounding the unsuccessful inter-Yemeni summit in Libya in July. President Salih visited Addis briefly on his way to this summit, one indication of the extent to which Ethiopia and the YAR grew closer together during this search for an acceptable formula for resolving the leadership crisis and refugee problem. Ethiopia continued to walk a line between the two PDRY factions, providing sanctuary without fanfare from time to time to the ex-president and, at the same time, conducting such high-level contacts with the new regime in Aden as Secretary-General al-Baydh's official visit in October 1986.

The Mengistu regime continued to have regular dealings with the two Yemens during the year following the Libyan summit, but it did not play a major role in the subdued, sporadic efforts to solve the intertwined Yemeni problems during this period. Contacts again became important and focused on these problems with visits by the Ethiopian foreign minister to each of the Yemens in July 1987 and another stay of several days in Addis by Secretary-General al-Baydh in mid-September. President Mengistu was in Sanaa for a few days in late September for the YAR's silver jubilee and on this occasion joined with President Salih in a major personal effort to mediate between President al-Attas and representatives of the ex-president. This effort to find an acceptable reconciliation formula also failed.

The new civilian regime in the Sudan also tried to take an active role in mediating the Yemeni conflicts. Unlike the al-Numayri regime, which had a long history of close ties with the YAR and lukewarm if not hostile relations with the PDRY, the regime headed by Sadiq al-Mahdi that took power in Khartoum in 1985 attempted from the outset to establish good relations with both Yemens. The

effort was successful, and these relations survived the January 1986 events and their aftermath. The Sudan attempted to mediate between the two PDRY leadership factions and the two Yemens from late 1986 through the following spring, and the visit of Prime Minister al-Mahdi to each of the Yemens in November 1986 was part of this effort. Although praised by all parties, this Sudanese initiative came to naught.

Somalia, long on grievances with the PDRY, did not act to make matters more difficult for the new regime in Aden in the months following the leadership fight. Indeed, the opposite occurred. In December 1986, the PDRY foreign minister visited Somalia, and the two states agreed to normalize relations, thereby ending strains that went back to the Ogaden War in 1977-78 when the PDRY clearly sided with Ethiopia. Somalia treated the two Yemens equally during the period of strained inter-Yemeni relations in the second half of the 1980s, and symbolic of this was President Muhammad Siad Barre's visits to the YAR in June 1987 and to the PDRY in October of that year.

Only ten days after fighting broke out in Aden, the president of Djibouti went to the YAR to discuss, as he put it, the containment of the conflict and the preservation of the integrity of South Yemen. When the PDRY, believing that a leader of the opposing faction was aboard, forced a Djibouti civilian airliner in route from Sanaa to Djibouti to land in Aden in August 1986, both governments worked hard and successfully to undo the damage inflicted by that blatantly hostile and illegal act. Thereafter, Djibouti remained on friendly terms with the PDRY as well as the YAR.

The reactions of the states of the Arabian Peninsula and the superpowers to the PDRY's intraparty crisis and strained inter-Yemeni relations were not unlike those of the countries of the Horn. Saudi Arabia resisted whatever temptations it may initially have had to try to turn the PDRY's intraparty crisis into a chance to rid the peninsula finally of its only Marxist regime. Instead, it picked up on the new leadership's expressed desire for continued good relations. President al-Attas' official visit in July 1986 yielded a generous package of aid; largesse probably designed both to strengthen moderates in the PDRY and to maintain it as a counter to an increasingly independent YAR. The other members

of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) wanted the new regime to continue the policy of regional moderation and detente, especially as it applied to the settling of remaining differences with neighboring Oman. Oman certainly wanted this, and, with assistance from Kuwait and the UAE, worked hard for its realization. The two former enemies did make progress toward demarcating their disputed border and quickly defused an accidental firefight along that border.

As the PDRY's chief patron, the Soviet Union was angered and embarrassed as well as alarmed by the bloody intraparty struggle. Despite early and strong warnings to outsiders not to use it as an excuse for intervention, Soviet leaders viewed the conflict in Aden as home-grown and publicly judged it the result of "mistakes" and "negative trends in the YSP." Accordingly, they were slow to embrace the new leaders warmly, even though they quickly gave up on ex-president Muhammad and worked hard with the new leaders to contain the conflict. Before becoming more forthcoming, they wanted evidence of the abilities of the new leaders, correction of the political errors that had caused the fight, and, if possible, reconciliation between the YSP faction in control in Aden and that of the ex-president in exile. Above all, the Soviet leadership wanted reassurances that these new leaders were willing and able to pursue the policy of regional detente that might both generate more economic aid for the PDRY from the GCC states and support Soviet efforts to improve its own relations with those same states. Clearly, the Soviet Union wanted the ex-president's successors to continue his moderate, pragmatic policies.<sup>12</sup>

For its part, the United States was noticeably silent and inactive following the PDRY's troubles. It made little effort either to influence outcomes in Aden or to improve less than warm relations with the YAR, despite the opportunity afforded by the visit to the YAR by Vice President Bush on the occasion of the opening of the Marib oil refinery only three months after the fighting in Aden.

**New Crisis and a Chance to Solve the Old: 1988 and Beyond.** Relations between the two Yemens worsened sharply in late 1987 when the continuing failure of the PDRY leadership to reconcile internal differences and solve the refugee problem combined with escalating tensions along the undemarcated border between the YAR's oil fields near Marib and

the PDRY's Shabwa region, the area where the Soviet Union struck a large pool of oil in late 1986. Both sides moved troops and heavy military equipment into the disputed borderland that had been the subject of the crisis defused by presidents Salih and Muhammad in early 1985. Amidst rumors of armed clashes, inter-Yemeni meetings were held in late 1987 and early the next year, and Yemeni summits involving Secretary-General al-Baydh and President Salih were held in the YAR in mid-April and early May 1988. On 4 May, the leaders of the two Yemens signed major agreements to revive the unification process, promote the free movement of Yemeni citizens across their common border, demilitarize the disputed borderland, and establish a public corporation to explore for and develop jointly the oil and other resources of that area.

As in the past, the two Yemens in May 1988 used the rhetoric of, and modest steps toward, Yemeni unification, to camouflage an exercise in crisis management and problem solving. The crucial event and real achievement was the containment of the border conflict that threatened to escalate into serious fighting. In the process, however, the leaders of the two Yemens seem to have created conditions and a mood in which the intraparty dispute and refugee problem could be solved on an informal, step-by-step basis; despite minor setbacks, important steps in this direction were taken over the next eighteen months. By late 1989, moreover, the two Yemens had normalized relations more generally and had advanced the process of coordination and cooperation that had begun to unravel in January 1986. Although at year's end they cloaked these important developments with another reaffirmation of imminent unification, it still seems most likely that the two Yemens will come to accept being Siamese twins, the two mostly separate parts of the same whole.

The countries of the Horn of Africa played virtually no role in the renewed process by which the two Yemens moved toward resolution of the refugee problem and other strains in inter-Yemeni relations in the late 1980s. Contacts between the countries of the Horn and the two Yemens became less salient and probably less frequent as the leadership crisis in the PDRY, and inter-Yemeni differences were gradually resolved in these most recent years. In effect, as politics in Southwest Arabia became less

extraordinary, relations between these two regions within eyesight of each other returned to normal, that is, good but somewhat peripheral. Numerous working visits of a technical nature took place in 1988 and 1989, as did a few ceremonial visits, among them the Sudanese prime minister's second visit to both Yemens, this time in September 1988. The celebration in 1988 of the silver jubilee of the PDRY's 14 October Revolution was attended by both Ethiopia's Mengistu Haile Miriam and Somalia's Muhammad Siad Barre, an occurrence that must have reminded many that times had changed since the fighting which had drawn the two Yemens into the politics of the Horn of Africa in the 1970s.

### Conclusions

What can be concluded from this review of the relations of the two Yemens and the countries of the Horn of Africa in the second halves of the 1970s and the 1980s? Given their physical and historical proximity, it is not surprising that the countries of Southwest Arabia have paid attention in recent years to events involving the countries of the Horn, and vice versa. The countries of each of the subregions have paid less attention to those of the other than might be expected, however, and this is largely the result of the preoccupation of new nation-states struggling for survival with matters very close to home. For their part, the two Yemens and Saudi Arabia have been taxed to near their limits by the intertwined domestic and external politics within their Southwest Arabian triangle. What attention has been paid to the Horn, moreover, has been for short periods and largely shaped by the more salient political game being played out within the triangle.

The Horn was less important to the two Yemens and Saudi Arabia, and vice versa, in the second half of the 1980s than in the second half of the 1970s. Moreover, there was a marked shift in the locus of salient activity or, more specifically, a reversal in stimulators and respondents, actors and reactors. In the second half of the 1970s, the Yemens and Saudi Arabia were reacting, for whatever reasons, domestic and/or external, to dramatic events in the Horn. By contrast, in the more recent period, it was the countries of the Horn which were reacting to intraparty turmoil in the PDRY and to the inter-Yemeni strains it produced.

Superpower involvement largely created and defined the Horn-Southwest Arabia dynamic problem in the second half of the 1970s and, by contrast, the superpowers and their global politics played minor roles in the second half of the 1980s. In the more recent period, the United States stood back and the Soviet Union urged the Yemeni parties to the problem to seek their own solution through compromise and reconciliation. The conflict in the Horn in the earlier period was a part and reflection of resurgent bipolar conflict, whereas that in Southwest Arabia in the more recent period was viewed by the superpowers, and especially the new Gorbachev regime, as an obstacle and threat to the revival of detente globally, regionally, and on the Arabian Peninsula.

The second half of the 1970s was a time of ferment and change, and most of the actors in the Horn-Southwest Arabia arena wanted considerable change of one sort or another. Some wanted to advance the process of revolution, and some of the others wanted to roll it back. Above all, the superpowers felt that there were things to be gained and lost, and they acted accordingly, directly or through proxies.

By contrast, in the second half of the 1980s, the key actors all wanted to a considerable degree to preserve a status quo that they perceived as threatened. Whereas dissension and futile attempts at consensus characterized the Horn-Southwest Arabia arena in the earlier period, the more recent period saw the emergence of a fragile consensus among the key actors in both areas, a consensus that most of the actors regarded as worth acting to preserve. In the earlier period, the leftward lurch of the new regime in Ethiopia, and that regime's nationalist struggles with the Eritreans and the Somalis, served to complicate the tentative and fragile efforts of the young Yemeni republics to normalize and improve their relations with each other and with their neighbor, Saudi Arabia. By contrast, a new convergence seemed to be coming about at the beginning of the second half of the 1980s between an increasingly secure and reformist YAR and the revolutionary regimes in Ethiopia and the PDRY, both of which seemed to be assuming similarly moderate and pragmatic postures. Indeed, in 1985, the top leaders of Ethiopia, the YAR, and the PDRY (Mengistu, Salih, and Muhammad),

seemed to be moving in the same direction and toward one another.

Finally, what is striking is the extent to which almost all actors in the second half of the 1980s, in contrast to the same period in the previous decade, tried to solve or at least contain a crisis that stubbornly refused to go away. Persistent crises are usually ripe for exploitation by others, and yet, in this instance, none of the external actors seemed willing or able to exploit it to their advantage. It does seem to have been partly a matter of will. The case of politics-run-amok in Aden apparently united and sobered a large part of the political class of the world. It is as if they all had a "but for the grace of God, there go I" reaction to the grotesque events in Aden. Probably more important, however, was the fact that no one was really able to exploit the crisis. Their individual circumstances, and those of the regional and global arenas, were such that it was in no one's interest to stir the pot further. Indeed, it seems that it was perceived to be to the advantage of many to clamp a lid on the crisis, to contain it, if not solve it, as quickly as possible. This was certainly true of the Soviet Union and all of the countries of the Horn of Africa: Ethiopia, Somalia, the Sudan, and Djibouti. Some of the countries of the Horn had real grievances against the PDRY, grievances which they chose not to press in the second half of the 1980s. These choices on the regional level were made easier, perhaps made possible, by the waning adversarial stance of the superpowers.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>On 22 May 1990, the Republic of Yemen was proclaimed, uniting the former Yemen Arab Republic with the former People's Democratic Republic of Yemen. Ed.

<sup>2</sup>For the political history of Yemen from ancient times to the mid-1970s, see Robert Stookey, *Yemen: The Politics of the Yemen Arab Republic* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1978); for North Yemen's politics, especially its external relations, from the early twentieth century to the first few years of the republic, see Manfred W. Wenner, *Modern Yemen, 1918-1966* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1968); and for North Yemen since the 1962 Revolution, see Robert D. Burrowes, *The Yemen Arab Republic: The Politics of Development, 1962-1986* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1987).

<sup>3</sup>For South Yemen from independence to the mid-1980s, see Tareq Y. Ismael and Jacqueline S. Ismael, *The People's*

*Democratic Republic of Yemen: Politics, Economics, and Society* (London: Frances Pinter, 1986); Helen Lackner, *P. D. R. Yemen: A Marxist Republic in Arabia* (London: Ithaca Press, 1985); and Norman Cigar, "State and Society in South Yemen," *Problems of Communism*, 34 (May-June 1985): 41-58.

<sup>4</sup>For Saudi-Yemeni relations, see M. S. El Azhary, "Aspects of North Yemen's Relations with Saudi Arabia," *Asian Affairs*, 15 (October 1984): 277-286; Nadav Safran, *Saudi Arabia: The Ceaseless Quest for Security* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985); and F. Gregory Gause III, *Saudi-Yemeni Relations: Domestic Structures and Foreign Influences* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).

<sup>5</sup>For the political upheaval on the Horn in the second half of the 1970s, see Tom J. Farer, *War Clouds on the Horn of Africa: The Widening Storm* (New York: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2nd. ed., 1979); and Marina Ottoway, *Soviet and American Influence in the Horn of Africa* (New York: Praeger Publications, 1982). For the radical political mood of the times, see "Upheaval in the Horn: Somalia, Eritrea, Ethiopia," *Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP) Reports* 7, No. 9 (November 1977): 3-24; and Fred Halliday, "The Arc of Revolution: Iran, Afghanistan, South Yemen, and Ethiopia," *Race and Class* 20, No. 4 (Spring 1979): 373-390.

<sup>6</sup>For the PDRY's external relations over its first 20 years, see Fred Halliday, *Revolution and Foreign Policy: The Case of South Yemen, 1967-1987* (London: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

<sup>7</sup>For the politics and development of the YAR in the second half of the 1970s, see Robert D. Burrowes, "State-Building and Political Construction in the Yemen Arab Republic, 1962-1977," in Peter J. Chelkowski and Robert J. Pranger (eds.), *Ideology and Power in the Middle East: Studies in Honor of George Lenczowski* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1988), 210-238. See also Burrowes, *The Yemen Arab Republic*, Chapters 5-7.

<sup>8</sup>For PDRY politics leading to the events of 1978, see Fred Halliday, "Yemen's Unfinished Revolution: Socialism in the South," *Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP) Reports* 9, No. 8 (October 1979): 3-20. For the politics and development of the PDRY through the 1970s, see Lackner, Chapter 3; and Ismael and Ismael, Chapters 2 and 3.

<sup>9</sup>For the YAR's politics of development and inter-Yemeni relations, late 1970s-mid 1980s, see Robert D. Burrowes, "The Yemen Arab Republic and the Ali Abdullah Salih Regime: 1978-1984," *Middle East Journal* 39, No. 3 (Summer 1985): 287-316. See also Burrowes, *The Yemen Arab Republic*, Chapters 8 and 9.

<sup>10</sup>For a short survey of 20 years of inter-Yemeni relations, see Fred Halliday, "The Yemens: Conflict and Coexistence," *World Today* 40 (August-September 1984): 355-362.

<sup>11</sup>For the domestic politics of the PDRY and inter-Yemeni relations, 1985-late 1988, see Robert D. Burrowes, "Oil Strike and Leadership Crisis in South Yemen: 1986 and Beyond," *Middle East Journal* 43, No. 3 (Summer 1989): 437-454.

<sup>12</sup>For USSR-PDRY relations before the January 1986 events, see Norman Cigar, "South Yemen and the USSR: Prospects for the Relationship," *Middle East Journal* 39, No. 4 (Autumn 1985): 775-795; and Fred Halliday, "Soviet Relations with South Yemen," in *Contemporary Yemen: Politics and Historical Background*, ed. B. R. Pridham (London: Croom Helm, 1984), 208-231. For relations after those events, see Fred Halliday, "Moscow's Crisis Management: The Case of South Yemen," *Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP) Reports* 18, No. 2 (March-April 1988): 18-22; David Pollack, "Moscow and Aden: Coping with a Coup," *Problems of Democracy* 35 (May-June 1986): 50-70; and Norman Cigar, "Soviet-South Yemeni Relations: The Gorbachev Years," *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies* 12, No. 4 (Summer 1989): 3-38.



# Saudi Arabia and the Horn of Africa

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The Saudi Arabian approach to political and security issues in the southern Red Sea littoral (southeastern Arabia, the Sudan, and the Horn of Africa) has in many ways been similar to that of the United States over the past four decades. In the United States, the political and strategic importance of this part of the world, so obvious to regional specialists both in and out of government, has been alternately neglected and the subject of keen and occasionally frenzied interest by senior US policy-makers. Despite its geographical proximity to Saudi Arabia, Saudi concern with lower Red Sea matters has run equally hot and cold.

Both Saudi and US security concerns in the region have generally been sparked by circumstances and events caused not by the littoral states, but by outside powers, notably the Soviet Union and countries perceived to be its clients. In the 1960s, the Soviets developed close relations with President Siad Barre in Somalia and built a major naval base at Berbera. In 1974, Marxist army officers toppled Emperor Haile Selassie, and the Soviets switched sides, abandoning Somalia for the larger and potentially more powerful Ethiopia. A bloody revolution in the Sudan in 1969 appeared to give the Soviets a major opening there, but after flirting with the left for a while, President Numayri shifted to the right, ultimately creating a narrowly Islamic regime. Thus the Soviet threat, in the Sudan at least, appeared to be neutralized.

Soviet behavior was just as opportunistic on the Arabian side of the Red Sea. Throughout most of the 1960s, the Soviets helped support their sometime client, President Nasser of Egypt, in propping up the republican regime the Egyptians helped to create in

Yemen in 1962. In 1967, the Egyptian withdrawal from Yemen during the June 1967 Arab-Israeli war led to a more moderate regime in Sana; and, in the same year, the withdrawal of the British led to a quasi-Marxist regime in the newly independent state of South Yemen. Here again, the Soviets switched sides and became South Yemen's most important foreign patron (although they were careful to maintain reduced political and military ties in Sana as well).

As these events unfolded, both Saudi Arabia and the United States would make intermittent efforts to stem Soviet political inroads. Both tried in vain to persuade Siad Barre not to allow the Soviets to construct the naval base at Berbera, for example. The United States also prepared policy and strategy studies from time to time on how best to deal with the Soviet threat in the region. In the 1960s, Ambassador Julius Holmes' monumental study of the strategic importance of the Horn of Africa evoked serious if fleeting interest among the government's foreign affairs community. In the 1970s, then National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski, with apparent cavalier disregard for the niceties of geographic detail, included the region in his Persian Gulf strategy, and in the 1980s, the Reagan version of the Persian Gulf strategy did largely the same thing. For the Saudis, on the other hand, such long-range policy planning is still a thing of the future.

Nevertheless, on balance, Saudi Arabia is the one Red Sea littoral state whose approach to the lower Red Sea-Horn of Africa region has largely paralleled that of the United States, both in alternating between policy neglect and intense policy interest, and in its concern over the threat of communist expansion. Indeed, the Saudis' concern over the expansion of communist influence on their own back doorstep has been so strong at times that their frustration with the United States has not been that it was too meddlesome, but that it was too prone to ignore what the Saudis felt was a clear and present

danger. If the current thaw in the Cold War leads the United States further to ignore the region, this frustration is likely to increase.

Despite all these similarities, it would be a great mistake to assume that individual Saudi responses to perceived communist threats in the lower Red Sea region have been more than superficially similar to US responses. The major difference lies in how the two countries perceive their interests and the threats to and opportunities for those interests in the region. In order to understand Saudi foreign policy in the lower Red Sea-Horn of Africa region, therefore, it is first necessary to look at broad Saudi perceptions of the world, how those perceptions affect their views of Saudi foreign policy interests, and how best to achieve and maintain those interests.

### **An Islamic Perception of Foreign Policy Interests**

The single unifying factor which ties together all the various Saudi foreign policy actions in the region, and indeed all Saudi foreign policies worldwide, is Islam. As keepers of Islam's two holiest sites, Mecca and Medina, the Saudis feel a special responsibility as protectors of the Muslim way of life. It is a responsibility that intensifies as one draws nearer to the Arabian Peninsula; and, as has been mentioned, the southern Red Sea and the Horn of Africa are on Saudi Arabia's back doorstep.

The Islamic nature of Saudi foreign policy is not based on emotion, tradition, or geographical proximity alone. It has a strong grounding in Islamic political theory. The ideological underpinning of the Saudi state is the eighteenth century Islamic fundamentalist revival of Shaykh Muhammad Abd al-Wahhab, generally called Wahhabism by outsiders. Wahhabism was in turn based on the teachings of an early Islamic legal scholar, Taqi al-Din Ahmad Ibn Taymiyah (d. 1328 A.D.). Ibn Taymiyah was a member of the Hanbali school of Islamic jurisprudence, one of four recognized Sunni schools, and the one to which the Saudis now subscribe. It is by far the most conservative of the four regarding personal, family, and civil matters, a fact reflected in Saudi social and legal codes to this day.

Ibn Taymiyah lived at the end of the Abbasid caliphate of Baghdad when many petty Muslim rulers were seeking legitimacy through legal opinions or *fatwas* from local Muslim juridical

scholars. Ibn Taymiyah decried this practice, insisting that political legitimacy comes only from strict adherence to the fundamental teachings of Islam, based on the holy Quran and the Sunna, the authoritative pronouncements of the prophet, Muhammad. Though a fundamentalist, Ibn Taymiyah was also a radical political theorist. Not only did he call for reform based on the fundamental teachings of the *Sharia* (Islamic law derived from the Quran and the Sunna), but, unlike most Sunnis, he claimed that *ijtihad*, the prerogative to interpret the *Sharia*, was still valid and that he was a practitioner (*mujtahid*).

Ibn Taymiyah reinterpreted the Islamic concept of *jahiliya* (lit. ignorance), which had previously referred to the pre-Islamic age, claiming that it also included any living Muslim who willfully disregarded God's law.

He also claimed that it was an obligation for the Muslim community to rise against any "jahili" ruler through *jihad* (literally, the personal and collective propagation of good and resistance of evil). This emphasis on the "holy war" aspects of jihad and the inclusion of backsliding Muslims as well as non-Muslim rulers as potential targets made Ibn Taymiyah's teachings potentially the most radical political teachings in Islam, rivaling those of the contemporary Shia revolutionary, Ayatollah Khomeini. By raising political violence against evil rulers to the status of a religious obligation (jihad), Ibn Taymiyah's teachings have become the doctrinal justification used by virtually every present day militant Sunni fundamentalist group seeking to justify the violent overthrow of a political regime. They are also the basis of Saudi foreign policy. From the Saudi perspective, foreign policy is basically jihad in the broader sense of propagating good and resisting evil worldwide by all means, not just the use of force.

Saudi foreign policy priorities are thus at least as much if not more ideological than geographical. They are also linked perceptually to the classical Islamic concept of a bipolar world: Dar al-Islam (the world of Islam) versus Dar al-Harb (literally the "world of war," but more correctly, the world outside the law, i.e., Islamic or God's law). It is not difficult to see how the Saudis have transposed this concept to the contemporary bipolar world. The Soviet threat is not just a geopolitical threat. Com-

munism, a godless doctrine, is the embodiment of the Dar al-Harb. As such, it has represented to the Saudis for the past 40 years the greatest political and ideological threat to the Muslim world and its way of life, an area that includes the lower Red Sea-Horn of Africa region.

Dar al-Islam is not inhabited by Muslims alone, but by all monotheists believing in the revealed word of God. These people, called the "people of the book," include Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians. The Wahhabi revival has always been ambivalent about the people of the book. Although Islam respects Judaism, Saudis are stridently anti-Zionist, which they consider a secular political doctrine. In addition, while the Saudis also respect the Christian values of Western societies, they deplore their secular political systems as being godless.

All this political theory has helped to create an order of priority in Saudi foreign policy, based primarily on the degree of the perceived threat to the Muslim way of life. Arab-Muslim states are the first priority, particularly those states closest to home. Threats to them have, in the Saudi view, come mainly from Zionism and communism. Secondly, the Saudis seek to extend political and financial support to non-Arab Muslim states, principally in Africa and Asia. Finally, the Saudis have been willing to extend some support to non-Muslim states world-wide that are faced with a serious communist threat. In all of this, the Saudis have long seen the United States as the ultimate defense against the communist domination of the Muslim world.

What we have been describing is not a systematic master plan for Saudi foreign policy, but a largely implicit, unarticulated set of perceptions that color specific reactions to specific situations and events. Let us now turn to see how these perceptions apply in the case of the lower Red Sea and the Horn of Africa. Geographically, the region certainly merits first priority attention from the Saudis: with the exception of Somalia, across the Gulf of Aden, the states of the region either border on or are across the Red Sea from the kingdom. Four of the states, North and South Yemen, Somalia, and the Sudan, are Arab, or at least are members of the Arab League, whatever may be said about the ethnic or national composition of their populations. Confessionally, all have Muslim majorities, with the exception of Ethiopia, which may have a Muslim majority.

Politically, two of the region's states, Ethiopia and South Yemen, have Marxist regimes.

Despite the relatively high priority the Saudis give to the region, they have never developed a regional foreign policy approach to deal with it. Saudi policy responses to specific problems in the area overlap, but do not comprise an organic whole. Each component part of Saudi foreign policy is viewed in its own terms with little or no attention to how it might impact with other policy actions. In a very real sense, the whole of Saudi policy in the region is considerably less than the sum of the parts.

### **Saudi Policy Responses**

Basically, Saudi responses to the countries of the lower Red Sea-Horn of Africa region can be divided into four distinct categories: the Somalia-Ethiopia conflict, the Eritrean insurgency, the Yemens, and the Sudan.

**The Somalia-Ethiopia Conflict.** Most of the ongoing conflict in the Horn of Africa is attributable to Somalia's long term policy interest in wresting the ethnically Somali Ogaden away from Ethiopia. Saudi interests in the area, on the other hand, focused on the welfare of the Muslim population and the strategic importance of the Red Sea as a major sea lane from the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean Sea.

Prior to the overthrow of Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia in 1974, the Saudis had a real perceptual problem of how to deal with the Somali-Ethiopian conflict. Haile Selassie was strongly anti-communist and a staunch friend of the West, but he was also pro-Israeli. (Part of his title, "the Lion of Judah," was a reflection of the Amharic ties with the ancient Jewish kingdoms of Yemen.) Equally disturbing to the Saudis, however, was their perception that the Ethiopian regime was mistreating their Muslim population.

President Siad Barre of Somalia, on the other hand, while born a Muslim in a Muslim country, styled himself as a socialist, and sought close relations with the Soviets. Siad Barre's primary motivation, however, was not so much ideological as it was intended to obtain outside support for Somalia's territorial dispute with US-backed Ethiopia over the Ogaden. From the Saudi perspective, the wrong country was pro-Soviet, and their policy, though tilting toward Ethiopia, was ambivalent and never very cor-

When Haile Selassie was replaced by a Marxist, military regime in Ethiopia in 1974, the dilemma disappeared. The new Ethiopian regime was not only viewed in Riyadh as godless communists, but it also maintained quiet ties with Israel. Siad Barre, on the other hand, was seen by the Saudis as representing, however imperfectly, the forces of Islam, a role he quickly adopted as he was abandoned by the Soviets and turned to the Saudis for support. Although never ceasing to be skeptical about Siad Barre's true loyalties, the Saudis have become a major financial backer and sometimes arms supplier of the impoverished Somali regime, enabling it to continue its opposition to Ethiopian sovereignty over the Ogaden, an area abutting Somalia and inhabited largely by Somali-speaking tribes.

Saudi attitudes toward Ethiopia took an additional downturn in October 1989 when Ethiopian-Israeli relations were resumed after a 16 year break. The Israeli rationale is that resumption of relations will help in its efforts to obtain Ethiopian cooperation in aiding Ethiopian Jews to emigrate to Israel. The Saudis believe this is at best a minor consideration aimed at assuaging American and particularly American Jewish opinion that might question close Israeli relations with a violently anti-American communist country; and that, in fact, the Israelis have been supporting Ethiopia against its Muslim neighbors all along, particularly in maintaining American-made military equipment. Most recently, Israel is thought to be providing cluster bombs for use against the Eritrean rebels. The Saudis are also concerned that the Israelis seek the use of Ethiopian naval facilities in the lower Red Sea, which would, in the Saudi view, greatly expand the Israeli military threat to all the Arab and Muslim countries in the region.

**The Eritrean Insurgency.** Most Saudis have looked upon the Eritrean irredentist movement in Ethiopia, entering its fourth decade, more in confessional than in ethnic or ideological terms: Muslim Eritreans against a non-Muslim central government in Addis Ababa. From the Saudi viewpoint, this issue is even further complicated since most of the Eritrean guerrilla groups were Marxist, ironically fighting a Marxist regime in Addis Ababa. Over the years, sporadic Saudi support to the rebels has concentrated on those whom they consider to be Muslim freedom fighters, notably, the oldest, and relatively

most conservative group, the Eritrean Liberation Front. To maintain this support, the ELF has muted its own earlier Marxist image when seeking support from the Saudis.

Both of these conflicts have settled into what could be called stalemates of intermittent violence, and while leaders and operational conditions change, the long-term Saudi approach has remained appreciably the same.

**The Yemens.** Saudi relations with the Yemens are exceedingly complex and are not handled in the usual foreign policy fashion. Prince Sultan, a brother of King Fahd and the minister of defense, has long been personally responsible for the conduct of Saudi relations with North Yemen, by far the more important of the two to the Saudis. Relations with South Yemen are handled mainly by the Saudi foreign ministry.

North Yemen first came under Saudi policy purview in 1934 when Prince (later King) Faysal invaded the country in what was essentially a border war involving the area around Najran. As oil revenues later turned Saudi Arabia from an impoverished desert kingdom to a major financial power, it became a major market for unskilled and semi-skilled Yemeni labor, willing to do tasks that the Saudis themselves thought were demeaning. It is estimated that up to one million Yemenis live and work in the kingdom at the present time, mostly at menial tasks. This has created a degree of Yemeni dependence on Saudi Arabia for employment opportunities and private transfer payments to their otherwise struggling economy. At the same time, the demeaning nature of their employment, coupled with the fact that the ruling elites in Yemen have traditionally been Zaydi Muslims, a Shia sect, has reinforced a generally patronizing attitude among Saudis toward Yemenis, an attitude greatly resented by the Yemenis.

In 1962, with Egyptian President Nasser's assistance, the Zaydi Imamate of Yemen was overthrown, and a radical Yemen Arab Republic was established. The republicans failed to eliminate the Imam, however, and with Saudi assistance, he was able to rally loyal Zaydi tribesmen. A civil war broke out that lasted until the Egyptians were forced to withdraw their forces in 1967. With a population of over twice that of Saudi Arabia, as many as one million of whom were resident in the Kingdom,

Yemen was seen as a major security threat by the Saudis. This belief was increased when the Saudis rounded up 17 Egyptian-trained Yemeni saboteurs sent by the YAR to wage a terrorist campaign in Saudi Arabia in early 1967.

After much negotiating, the Saudis accepted the republic with a much more moderate regime. By 1970, political relations between the two countries were normalized, and Saudi Arabia went on to become a principal financial backer and arms supplier for the North Yemeni regime. The relationship has never been cordial, however, despite strong mutual interests. Saudi financial aid is often delayed and parsimonious, and its military aid even more so, and the YAR has often attempted to play off the Saudis (and the Americans) by seeking more Soviet support. Thus, the fissiparous dynamics of sparsely populated haves versus populous have-nots, employers versus employees, Sunni Hanbalites versus Shia Zaydis, and Islamic monarchists versus republicans have not deterred cooperation but have been simply too strong for truly warm relations.

The greatest mutual Saudi-North Yemeni interest has been the threat from South Yemen. In 1967, the South Yemenis gained independence from the British and installed a radical, Marxist regime in Aden. Among its first acts were to seek closer relations with the Soviet Union and to seek to undermine the internal security of all its Arabian neighbors: North Yemen, Saudi Arabia, and Oman. In North Yemen, the Aden regime sought to undermine governmental authority by exacerbating tribal and confessional differences. (The Sunni Shafi of North Yemen, coreligionists with South Yemenis, have historically been subjected to Zaydi domination.) On the South Yemeni border with Saudi Arabia, Yemeni troops exchanged fire with Saudi troops in at least two major incidents; and, in Oman, Aden backed a Marxist insurgency until it was crushed in the late-1970s.

Not surprisingly for the region, however, the confrontation between Aden and its neighbors had its share of ambiguities. The Soviets never fully backed South Yemeni adventurism, and the South Yemenis never gave the Soviets unrestricted rights to their military facilities. (Aden is one of the finest harbors in the Indian Ocean.) The famous "Soviet naval base" at the South Yemeni island of Sokotra, moreover, is not a base at all, for the sheer 6,000 foot

heights of the island make it a poor site for a base. Rather, it provides an excellent wind break from the monsoons for Soviet ships which ride at anchor on the lee side of the island. Finally, North and South Yemen, when they were not fighting each other, periodically announced plans for political union, an event which would be strongly opposed by the Saudis if there were any real likelihood of its ever coming to pass.

Despite Saudi antipathy to the Marxist regime in Aden, and many ups and downs in their efforts, the Saudis have been able to work out a policy of mutual coexistence with the South Yemenis in the past dozen years, based primarily on petrodollars. South Yemen is economically impoverished, one of its few foreign exchange earners being an obsolete oil refinery built by the British. Over time, the leadership, realizing that its adventurism was not succeeding and that it was costing the country precious resources, moderated its policies of trying to spread Marxism through subversion and tacitly agreed to a *modus operandi* with the Saudis which has become one of the more successful Saudi policies in the region. Even efforts by Libya to stir up mischief against the conservative states in the area have not succeeded in keeping Marxist South Yemeni adventurism to manageable proportions.

**The Sudan.** Saudi relations with the Sudan are far older than most outside observers (and indeed most Saudis) realize. The Khatmiyah *tariqa* (an Islamic sect) in the Sudan originated in Mecca in the eighteenth century, long before the Wahhabis of central Arabia consolidated control of the area. And in the twentieth century, the Saudis have given financial support to members of the Sudanese Muslim Brotherhood for years and additional support to the Sudanese government beginning with the Khartoum payments in the late 1960s. The Hajj, or Mecca Pilgrimage, also features prominently in the Sudanese economy. West African Hajjis regularly stop off in Sudan to work in the cotton and sorghum fields on their way to and from Mecca, often spending years in the Sudan. Called *Fulani*, they are an important part of the work force.

Despite these historic ties, most Saudis understand little of the complexities of the geographically huge, multi-ethnic and multi-confessional country that is a part of both the Arab world and sub-Saharan Africa. In many Saudi eyes, the confrontation be-

tween Muslim northern Sudanese and non-Muslim southern Sudanese is primarily a conflict between believers and non-believers, and much traditional Saudi financial support to the country has gone to Islamic institutions and organizations.

This might not have been a bad thing if the Sudan had been in a better position to sort out its own political and economic problems. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, however, the Sudan's precipitous economic decline coincided with President Numayri's efforts to maintain power by establishing a strict Islamic legal system. The imposition of Islamic law in September 1983 met with large scale political opposition in the Muslim north and greatly helped to bring about the resurgence of civil war in the non-Muslim south where local inhabitants bitterly resented it. Numayri's government, virtually bankrupt, was simply unable to maintain even rudimentary services in the countryside and counter the insurgency at the same time, and in 1985, he was deposed. The succeeding parliamentary government fared no better, and in 1989, it was deposed by the military, which will apparently continue the imposition of strict Islamic law. Thus, the civil war drags on with no one apparently able to stop it.

Into this morass, Saudi financial support to the Muslim groups, particularly the Muslim Brotherhood and its political party, the National Islamic Front, has added to, not lessened, the chaos. The Saudis established the Faysal Islamic Bank to serve as a major conduit for Saudi financial aid. With its relatively large assets in such a poor country, the bank, together with other Islamic banking institutions, has been able to corner large segments of the Sudanese economy, creating conditions for corrupt practices among Sudanese businessmen seeking large fortunes or simply seeking to survive financially. Politically, the bank's financial clout has helped buy support for maintaining the strict Islamic laws which have both helped keep the Muslim north politically fragmented over Islamization of the country, and has kept north-south animosities alive. Thus, generous Saudi financial support to Muslim institutions has unwittingly contributed to keeping the Sudan politically fragmented and economically destitute.

### **Prospects for the 1990s**

One of the things experience teaches is that if one were to follow every supposed major turning point in the politics of a region, it would be like riding a carousel. Simply put, most turning points are not. The 1990s, however, really do appear to be beginning on a major turning point in history, not merely of the lower Red Sea-Horn of Africa region, but the world. The events occurring in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe over the past months would have been unthinkable just a few years ago. The impact on the lessening of the Cold War and on superpower rivalries in the Third World are still incalculable, but they are likely to be great. And nowhere are these changes likely to affect regional political dynamics more than in the lower Red Sea-Horn of Africa region.

Saudi policy in the region for the past four decades has concentrated on halting the spread of atheistic communism in neighboring states and Muslim societies. In the 1960s, the communist threat appeared to be borne primarily by the foreign policy machinations of Egypt's President Nasser. In the 1970s and 1980s, a more direct Soviet presence was created. In the 1990s, however, the Soviets appear to be reducing their presence in the region. Financial aid to Ethiopia and South Yemen is going down, despite the desperate straits in which those countries find themselves. The Ethiopians, in particular, can do little about this trend, for they have nowhere else to turn, and the South Yemenis have probably extracted all they can from the Saudis for their nuisance value.

The reason for the downturn in Soviet activity is not merely to be found in glasnost. The lower Red Sea-Horn of Africa region never did figure highly in superpower rivalries to begin with. The major strategic feature of the region is the Bab al-Mandab, the narrow strait at the southern end of the Red Sea through which all shipping bound for the Mediterranean Sea via the Suez Canal must transit. If there is one thing on which the Soviets and the Americans agree, however, it is freedom of passage through international straits. The Soviets, who must pass through international straits to get to their own home ports in the Baltic and the Black Sea, would find it almost impossible to adopt policies that could challenge that principle.

From the Saudi perspective, the strategic importance of the Bab al-Mandab has been greatly reduced in recent years. Most supertankers travel from the Gulf around southern Africa and the Cape of Good Hope because the Suez Canal is not deep enough to handle them. Many smaller tankers take the shorter route through the Red Sea and the canal on the way to Europe, but the Saudis have built an oil pipeline across the Arabian Peninsula to Yanbu, on the Red Sea, bypassing the Bab al-Mandab.

At the same time, the Saudis are far from indifferent about the strategic threat to shipping in the Red Sea. In their view, the greatest threat now comes from Israel in the north. In the lower Red Sea, the Saudis remained concerned by what they believe is the continuing quiet cooperation between Israel and Ethiopia against their common Muslim enemies.

Beyond the importance of the Red Sea as a major sea lane for oil, the strategic value of the lower Red Sea-Horn of Africa region, as Dr. Brzezinski rightly understood, is its geopolitical proximity to the area of real strategic importance in the Indian Ocean, the Gulf with its vast oil resources. Soviet interest in the Gulf has not been diminished by recent events and is not likely to be so in the foreseeable future. The instruments for pursuing its interests, however, are far more likely to be political and economic than political and military as they have been for the last four decades. Thus, the political-military presence the Soviets have attempted to build up in the lower Red Sea region will be of correspondingly less importance to their strategic interests in the Gulf. This is not to say the Soviets will unilaterally withdraw, but as the strategic importance of their presence in the region diminishes, their willingness to subsidize local client states in return for a largely military presence is likely to diminish also.

Another reason for declining Soviet interest is the extremely bleak prospects for all the countries in the region. Despite Soviet aid, the regimes in Aden and Addis Ababa are barely able to survive politically or economically, and, within the more pro-Western states, the Siad Barre regime in Somalia and the new military regime in Sudan are just as hopeless. Prop-

ping up unpopular, impoverished, incompetent, and insurgency-ridden regimes in the lower Red Sea-Horn of Africa region is not all that appealing to the Soviets, given the area's diminished importance to the primary Soviet regional interests in the Gulf.

If Soviet interest in the Red Sea-Horn region does decline in the 1990s as seems likely, there is also likely to be a commensurate decline in US interest in the area, not only because US regional interests have for years been shaped by competing Soviet interests, but also because the United States' primary regional interests in the Indian Ocean are also located in the Gulf. To the degree that both superpowers disengage from the Red Sea-Horn area, even if only incrementally, the already questionable prospects for political and economic stability there will decline further. It will be increasingly more difficult for local governmental and guerrilla leaders to play off East against West.

This is the situation that Saudi Arabia is likely to face in the 1990s. Moreover, as other potential sources of financial aid dry up, the area's leaders will increasingly importune the Saudis for more aid. And as communism and anti-communism both appear less and less fruitful as an avenue for gaining outside support against one's ethnic, national, confessional, or tribal enemies, there is also the likelihood that Islamic fundamentalism will be increasingly seized upon by dissident groups and governments alike as a justification for violent acts as well as for Saudi financial support.

This is not a pleasant prospect for the Saudis, and they will probably turn to the United States for help. The degree to which the US responds, in the absence of a direct Soviet threat as a motivating factor, could be crucial to the state of US-Saudi relations, at a time when the oil glut is likely to be ending and US oil imports become increasingly important to its economic well being. Thus, for the United States as well as for Saudi Arabia, the importance of the lower Red Sea-Horn of Africa region in the 1990s may well be the impact it has on their bilateral relations and on the far more important issue of the security and accessibility of Gulf oil for the United States and the rest of the Western world.

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